



European Commission
Justice

With financial support from the
Daphne III Programme of the European Union



Prosociality Against Violence and Exclusion

The perception of violence among peers in an European perspective

Studies carried on in Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Romania, Malta,
France, Slovenia and Greece



This publication has been produced with the financial support of the Daphne III Programme of the European Commission. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the ProSAVE Partnership and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.



Montesca
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Foreword

The study carried on under the framework of the Prosave project intends to identify a number of implications for children and their families, schools and actions related to the children's perception of violence. These implications have to provoke some recommendations and they have to be the basis for the application of a prosocial approach in Primary School all over Europe.

Some of these mile-stones can be underlined: violence in society has many sources and forms of expression; it requires systematic attention at many levels to reduce its incidence. There is a problem related to the violence expressed by the Media, insomuch as it can be considered as the prevalent form of violence in children's lives. Therefore the implications arising from the Prosave study, related to some relevant European Countries (Slovenia, Italy, Greece, Spain, France, Malta Romania and Bulgaria), are that teachers should monitor how the children act and how apparently innocent acts can be preliminary to a violent behaviour.

A way proposed for facing the generally growing phenomena of aggressions and bullying can be a process, known as prosociality.

We need to start from this point in order to define the terms of prosociality.

The scientific basis are well defined by the so called "game theory" that can be considered one of the greatest contributions of experimental economics.

This theory is the development of experimental protocols ("games") that measure human preferences in a standardized fashion. These games can be used to measure differences between individuals, contexts and cultures at the behavioral level, providing a valuable complement to self-report surveys. Instead of merely asking someone about the importance of helping others, for example, an experimental game reveals whether they actually do help others in situations that involve real financial loss and gain.

In practical terms, when some individuals have to face with an economic challenge, they are naturally pushed toward an equilibrium.

This equilibrium is reached when the challengers are next to be satisfied by their own positions.

The characteristic of the cooperation is the term that can be defined as **social capital** to be

referred to the benefits that can be obtained from social relationships, similar to financial capital, physical capital (e.g., a dwelling) and individual capital (e.g., an education). Those tangible substances namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit....The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself.... If he comes into contact with his neighbour, and this with other neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbours.

The prosociality is the theoretical assumption of this social system of relationships:

when an act is addressed not to a personal interest but is done in order to assure a general interest and with this act the individuals are aware to stay in an area of respect of rules (event if not written), commonly accepted and made to assure the well-being of the social group or community the individuals feel to be part.

For the accomplishment of this kind of acts, no external reward is expected

The prosocial acts can be defined in a list (not definitive):

- physical and psychological help
- sharing the others' emotions (empathy)
- meta-verbal approach towards the others' problems addressed to increase the sense of safeness
- defending the others against threatens
- take into account and appreciate the others' points of view and differences.

In this approach the prosocial acts have to be referred to a specific Community. This can be defined as an Educating Community. The social space related to this community is characterized by the fact that all the social actors share the same educative goals. In this sense the “educative conflicts” are overcome or managed.

In the Community, the role of the educators is often informal. As we can see that whether we are parents or specialist educators, we teach. When we are engaged in learning projects we teach

ourselves. In all of these roles we are also likely to talk and join in activities with others (children, young people and adults). Some of the time we work with a clear objective in mind - perhaps linked to some broader plan e.g. around the development of reading. At other times we may go with the flow - adding to the conversation when it seems right or picking up on an interest.

The prosocial approach can contribute to make children feel safe in their homes, in their communities and in their schools, even if emotional violence is not the most prevalent form of both direct and indirect violence. For many children in the Countries involved in the investigation, the conclusion leads to affirm that bullying is part of their childhood. This form of emotional violence was found to have a negative impact on their lives. Children rated the impact of emotional violence higher than that of physical violence, which suggests that the negative effect of emotional or psychological abuse has implications for schools in relation to bullying.

The research proceeded using two forms of analysis:

- a survey carried out through questionnaires addressed to children, parents, educative and non-educative staff;
- asking the children to draw what they consider “violent”.

The results were analysed by a group of experts, psychologists and pedagogues and, for the first time, the research tries to single out a common view about what can be considered as a form of violence, out of the very common (and not scientifically based) definition of bullyism.

The study found that all violence among peers has great impact. What is not covered under the provision of the national criminal laws leaves a great space to acts of aggression, not punishable, but that can influence the future lives of our children.

Another consideration is very important: the level of children's exposure to violence in the Countries taken into account is relatively high. While the study revealed high prevalence and incidence rates, contextual factors often associated with violence were found to be of minimal practical importance in the education in practice.

There is an immediate need for Primary school teachers to face the growing level of violence in European schools. The so-defined anti-bullying efforts are called to be strategic with the aim of providing safe learning environments. Furthermore, the dimension of the aggressive behaviours among peers should be taken into account. This level of aggression is the other side of a lack of

positive social perception the children have. The number of children not feeling safe at school is more nowadays than twenty years ago. Then, the local dimension, the traditional village and the local community provided the needed assistance and contributed to the creation of a prosocial environment. We do need to re-create a modern form of that “educative village” where the children shall be safe and happy.

1. Introduction

Violence against children went not discussed for centuries in Europe. Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, as historians have suggested, the age of a child constituted no guarantee and little protection against a variety of now commonly unacceptable actions, including battering, physical beating and overall labor exploitation.

Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was no defined concept of childhood vulnerability or childhood innocence. According to historians, a belief in child protection and child nurture were accidental by-products, rather than a central purpose, of family life and child rearing. There was no body of law that defined children as a special class of people and adults as criminally libel when they employed life-threatening forms of discipline or punishment against the young. Children and adults were everywhere joined. Children did not attend school for extended periods of time and, as artists and writers portrayed them, children were everywhere visible and underfoot in the full array of social spaces where adult men and women worked, played, slept, bathed, prayed, and consorted. In short, children had few if any protected spaces in which to avoid physical assault and injuries to body, mind, or soul.

2. Definition of Child in the national laws

In the recent years, most of the European Countries adopted the term “child” using the definition of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These approach was adopted in 1992 and it became national law in Greece, where it covers the ages 0-18 years and misunderstandings might be created since “a child”, under the Penal Code, was the person of 7-12 years of age. The second reason is based on the finding that maturity varies among individuals - especially minors - some of them being, from a mental or psychological point of view, less developed or more developed than what their real age indicates. Thus, the new provisions refer, when necessary, to the age limits of the minors concerned, instead of the label “adolescent”. In some others countries, as for instance Bulgaria, the process of development and implementation of child policies has started with an almost ten-year delay, therefore today the Bulgarian society needs fast introduction of brave reforms in order to ensure the best possible conditions for child development. One of the highest

achievements identified by experts in the field of children's rights is the well-developed legal framework and specifically the Law on Child Protection, as well as all resulting changes in key legislation concerning the application of the Convention in all its aspects. The creation of the Departments for Child Protection has been identified as an indisputable success in the context of the Convention's implementation.

Generally, juvenile delinquency is defined in terms of the age at which the person who commits the act or crime is, and he/she cannot be subject to legal sanctions because of age.

It includes three categories of juvenile delinquents:

- I. Offenders under 14 who are not criminally liable for their actions due to lack of discernment. In this case, damage to property shall be borne by the family, and the authors can be integrated into special schools for rehabilitation.
- II. Minors between 14 and 16 are criminally liable only if found to have committed the act with discernment. Damage to property is borne by families and individuals can be integrated into special school rehabilitation or in a reform school in detention.
- III. For young people over 16 years, it is estimated that they have discernment and can be tried and punished criminally, although damage to property shall be covered by the family.

Individuals can be punished either by integration into a special school until 18 years; after reaching this age, they have to continue their sentence in formation of special prisons for such categories of adolescences . These age limits can be changed from a legal system to another depending on how the process of maturation is defined by the legislator.

In many Countries, the Penal Code stipulates that an educational measure, a fine or juvenile detention may be imposed on them; in addition to this, the revoking of a driving licence and banishment from the country for foreign residents may be passed as accessory sentences.

3. A framework about the Juvenile Violence in Europe

Violence in schools seems to be a very common phenomenon.

A research in a big Bulgarian town shows that 65% of the students admit being a witness to a violent act at school. To the question where there is the greatest possibility to face aggression and

violence children say at school. The higher number of signals for violence can partly be explained with the increased sensitivity of the Bulgarian society. Yet the cases become more serious and children get used to seeing violence around them

In the report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs the typical juvenile forms of violence are listed – physical injury, threats, pressure, blackmail and theft and offences against the property. Although the various manifestations of violence at school and their factors have been investigated, a unified statistics of the number and distribution of the cases has not been created.

In France the juvenile delinquency is increasing : the 25% of the acts relevant under the criminal law are committed by under 28 in 2006, being no more than 14% in 1990. However another point of view witnesses that 3/4 of the criminal acts are committed by adults.

This is the term according to what the French debate is used to discuss the issue. The acts are considered both when children are victims or persecutors. But what worries the most the public opinion is how to face the acts of violence, living the phenomena as a possible treat to the social peace.

The so called “Bobigny affaires” shows the common perception about the phenomenon: the juvenile violence is generally considered as “the problem” in place were living is more and more difficult (<http://www.nationspresse.info/?p=27290>).

In Greece, according to Spinellis and Tsitoura report there is a slightly increasing trend in overall youth crime. It concerns mainly children aged 7-12, while the age group 18-20 presents a slight increase as well. Teenagers aged 13-17 show stability. Special penal laws and particularly the Road Traffic Act are related to the majority of recorded crimes.

A study conducted by Albert Bell in Malta (1992) on juvenile delinquency between 1986 and 1992 indicates an intensification of serious offences committed by minors.

Violence represents the attempt of achieving by force a material advantage, a psychological benefit or a certain type of behaviour from the person that is bullied. Certain types of violence are obvious, others are more subtle and relate to the disruption of the delicate psycho somatic balance of a person, recurring to threats, blatant voice, vulgarities that generate repulsion or fear.

Fierce violence (murders, injuries, rapes, etc) does not appear suddenly in a person’s behaviour. It is the result of the accumulation of many small acts of aggression where he/her was a victim or an

author during his/her life and that marked his/her character. It is also the result of a certain poor type of thinking and unproductive lifestyle.

Juvenile delinquency is a present-day social problem. Furthermore, the policy of the educational institutions, of the social courts have proven their limits and weak points, thus generating more than ever negative effects that can be found within the delinquent acts committed by juveniles and young people coming from different background.

Juvenile delinquency includes "conduct and actions that are committed by immature persons who have not reached the age of majority yet and have therefore no social responsibility".

- I. It is possible to define some characteristics of behaviour disorders underlying criminality:
- II. Due to the fact that high self-awareness structure (legal liability issues of general moral conduct) stratifies intensely during puberty and adolescence, we can talk about moral development of deviant behaviours, especially after the age of seven;
- III. Until puberty, morally deviant behaviour manifests itself, especially as social, family or school maladjustment, and rarely as anti-social manifestations. During puberty and adolescence criminality is related to socio-affective immaturity or adjustment difficulties in legislation and restrictions;
- IV. in young children, behaviour manifests as a series of unbearable behaviour-related bans (prohibition of activities that they enjoy), but also of the fear of punishment or emotional deprivation;
- V. deviant behaviour may occur relatively early and have a wide range of events, often stereotyped (automated) as an obvious incapacity of progress under the influence of education (juvenile);
- VI. There are many forms of boundary behaviours between the conformist and morally or legally deviant behaviour ;
- VII. Criminality is related to age and social and cultural law structures;
- VIII. According to statistics, behavioural disorders have the highest frequency between 14 and 16.

Deviant behaviour of individuals, and especially of behaviours of young people, are considered first of all to be the expression of the educational and socialising dysfunction of the family, as well as school and other institutions such as media, church, or negative social factors , such as the street group.

In this field, more or less generally known research has been undertaken which aimed to highlight the causes and conditions that generate and promote criminal behaviour of juveniles, identifying subjective and objective factors that cause deviant behaviour, both as an individual event and as a group phenomenon. In order to truly know and control the evolution of the phenomenon the intervention and the concurrent development of methodology of scientific knowledge with that of helping operations is indispensable. So as to improve the consequences of the dysfunction of the social courts, to minimize the effects of factors on the emergence of the phenomenon, as well as re-socialization and reintegration for children, an important role is occupied by various specialists in the practice of social control. Promoting reforms in social protection and judicial practice is absolutely necessary.

Differentiation of working methods and the improvement of the existing services as well as the creation of new structures in the field of operative intervention represent the primary objective that would ultimately lead to the reduction of this worrying phenomenon.

To capture some deeper aspects of the phenomenon (tendencies, characteristics) leading to an increased efficiency in the sphere of combating and preventing it, there are those groups of crimes that by the nature and frequency share in the overall of juvenile crime and indicate a high degree of social danger. These are:

- crimes at the expense of public wealth;
- crimes at the expense of private wealth;
- crimes against the person;
- crimes against the relations of social coexistence.

Among the factors predisposing to delinquency are noted features of personality structure, such as:

- reduced intellectual abilities of the individual (mental delays, debility, mediocrity);
- temperamental traits (choleric and melancholic temperament promote developments towards deviance, while the phlegmatic and sanguineous establish multiple barriers to interiorise pre-deviant or deviant behaviour patterns);
- psycho-pathological disorders (mentally disabled children, neurotic children, with frequent depression, impulsive children with frequent bouts of aggression, etc.)

There are however, different situations and approaches, but also positive indications in a way to

face violence among peers. According to data from the Slovenian Annual Report of the Police, the scope of juvenile crime was on the decrease in 2010. Juvenile offenders were suspected of 2,150 or 7.2% of criminal offences less than the year before. Sexual assaults on a person under 15 years of age prevail (37 assaults). Nineteen juvenile offenders caused serious physical injuries and three committed rape. Compared to 2009, unauthorised production and drug trafficking, illicit substances in sport and precursors for illicit drug production, thefts, aggravated thefts and extortions were on the rise, while the number of light physical injuries, sexual violence, presentation, manufacture, possession and distribution of pornographic material, robberies and frauds fell. Juvenile offenders amounted to 7.2% of all suspects. 2,859 children and juveniles were victims of criminal offences or injured persons thereby, which is 3.2% less than in 2009 (Report on the Work of the Police for 2010).

The main limit of this approach can be considered the concept itself of “violence” and the dimension of the phenomenon, not considered from other points of view than the criminal dimension and the effects on the criminal status of the “actors”.

This aspect leads us to discuss about the relationship between education and violence phenomena. As we know, most of the studies carried out in the countries involved in the investigation confirm that the real dimension of the violence is not just what is to be considered under the provisions of the national criminal laws.

It is quite hard to define the consistency of all the acts of aggression that involve the dimension of the offence to the social role of every single child in his/her context, but are not defined in penal terms.

This aspect introduces the debate about the relationships between education and aggressive behaviours, in the effort to give a contribution to a definition of peer violence in primary schools.

4. Violence among peers in primary schools

Micro-social risks have a key significance for the emergence and consolidation of negative deviant trends in a child’s behaviour because their impact is directly focused on the basic way a child perceives itself and other people in its environment; they also define the intensity and directional force of macro-social factors and the manifestation of a number of individual factors. Starting from

this point, the relevance of the social dimension having as a consequence future potential aggressive behaviours, in most of the Countries experts tried to focus the content of the socially aggressive acts.

The French experts are used to list three categories of expressions of violence in School : bullying, incivility and anti-social behaviours (Carra et Faggianelli, 2003). Under the term “school-bullying” we can find every expression of violence occurred in school including acts of periodic vexations against peers. The researches followed an another initiative launched in Scandinavia (Olweus, 1993) and then enlarged to some others European countries .

The results specifically referred to France were not so different form other similar situations: the victims oppressed are exposed to risks of educative failure. They show anxiety and psychological disorders and there were some case of suicide.

It is commonly recognized that the definition of the category of violence comes for the definition accepted in the United States, «elle se situe dans le développement d’une problématique liée au sentiment d’insécurité» (Carra et Faggianelli, 2003, 209). The concept of “incivilité” gathers different social disorders considered by the school-mates or by the teachers as daily attempt to the good relationships into the class (Milburn, 2000).

However, any conduct is a choice, but if there is a low level of education, the individual’s possibilities to choose are drastically reduced; in addition, in the absence of self-discovery, the individual does not even really choose, instead, he borrows attitudes and behaviours and adopts them without thinking about the consequences, turning them into self-destructive or destructive behaviour patterns. It is underlined in Romania that the reasons that cause juvenile violence, can be defined and the experts agree about a set of categories, considered relevant by most of the European experts:

a) Dysfunction and educational default of the family environment

In current circumstances, the family has the strongest impact on the formation of character, being crucial for the antisocial orientation of the child and adolescent.

Although variations in the behaviour of adolescents depend not only on family background and parental socialization techniques, but also on other agents of socialization (schools, various state institutions, media);

b) Deficiencies in educational environment.

Deficiencies of the educational environment in general and of the school in particular influence increasing of juvenile delinquency, which subsequently passes on adult behaviour, leading to progressive forms of crime growing in intensity and diversity.

c) Socio-economic shortcomings

Fluctuations in the labour market, social care and poor, inconsistent retraining and retraining programs have unpredictable consequences and lead to various forms of violent expression.

From the point of view of the attackers, the percentages of those who accept that they are the perpetrators social exclusion, insults, offensive nicknames and of those who beat and threaten others in order to scare them, have decreased. The only category which seems to have slightly increased is the one relating to thefts of property belonging to classmates.

Finally, witnesses to verbal aggression are also in decline, perhaps because new forms of harassment are emerging in school (cyber bullying) which we will now discuss below. In both studies, the percentage of pupils who state that they have witnessed harassment is higher than that of victims and perpetrators.

5. The dimension of the phenomenon

The existing data confirmed the existence of the growing problem in European schools. The study conducted in two Italian cities (Florence, central Italy; Cosenza, southern Italy) on 1,379 pupils from primary and middle schools (Genta et al., 1996) found that about 42% of children in primary school and 28% in secondary school indicated that they had been bullied by peers at least sometimes in the previous three month period. Other subsequent studies confirmed that the incidence of bullying tends to be bigger in Italy than in other countries, considering that about one-half of pupils in elementary/primary grade school and one-third in middle/secondary grade school claimed to have been bullied (Fonzi, 1997; Baldry and Farrington, 1999). Many possible explanations have been put forward to account for the peculiarity of the Italian situation. It seems unlikely that methodological or procedural differences can explain these findings, but some cultural differences could be playing a part here. For example, the semantic value of the Italian term 'prepotenze' may not correspond completely to the term 'bullying'. The first, in fact, may reflect a wider range of behaviours. Moreover, in the Italian culture laughing at someone else or making fun of other

persons seems to be more frequent than in Northern countries and children consider this behaviour less serious than do others (Menesini and Fonzi, 1997). In any case, all the experts agree that there are different forms of bullying. There is an interesting point with regards to the peak of bullies/victims at middle school registered in Greece. Middle-school students attended the 3rd grade of Gymnasium, which means they were the oldest at school so they had large numbers of younger students to bully as a reaction to their own long victimization. It also appears that middle school is a convenient ground for the display of bullying due to adolescence (hormones & experimentation), limited supervision, and loose relations with teachers, and formation of social hierarchies. Additionally there are more direct forms of bullying at preschool, less direct at the higher levels of education as students' cognitive & social abilities develop. It turns out that older students may become too embarrassed to talk to others about their victimization. Younger students adopt more active coping mechanisms (they do something about it), whereas older students just try to ignore it, which may not always be a very effective coping strategies; it may even sometimes aggravate bullies. This may be one reason why there is an increase with age. It should be mentioned that there is a gradual decrease of intervention & sympathy toward victims with age & adoption of more pro-violence attitudes. Another reason why there is a peak at middle school, because nobody seems to intervene to stop this. Also, chronic victimization appears to harden audiences, who start to feel that the victim deserves several important points in terms of anti-bullying interventions at schools. It is additionally proved that the starting point of bullying is at the pre-school level. This seems to be the starting point of the phenomenon, as behaviors are not characterized yet by stability and chronicity. It is recommended to work with students, parents, & teachers to inform & sensitize them, as preventative measures are much more effective than intervention. At the elementary level, the phenomenon becomes more stable & chronic. However, students still report incidents to adults, are more sympathetic toward the victims, thus, more likely to intervene & help and are more against violence. All these can be used both in prevention & intervention programs that will focus on conflict resolution & social skill development. It is also time to get adults involved both in the identification of the problem as well as the intervention efforts. The middle school appears to be the level where the phenomenon peaks. This means that we need to work at the individual, classroom, and school level, get everybody involved in the effort, and focus on peer networks to avoid the development of negative or indifferent attitudes toward victims later on. At the high school level, work must focus on the sensitization (or re-sensitization) of the whole school

community to the issue and to activate and work with peer networks, which appear extremely stable and extremely important for students.

As stated by the Committee on the rights of children (CRC) there is a dearth of information regarding acts of violence by children. Borg (1999) conducted a study on 6282 children in Malta from 1st to 6th grades (primary schools). The study focused on the incidence, nature and reactions of bullying from the perspectives of bully and victim. The findings indicated that one in three pupils were involved in serious bullying either as a perpetrator or a victim. The victims of bullying reported these emotions:

- Feeling vengeful – 38.3%
- Angry 37.1%
- Self pity 36.5%
- Indifferent 24.7%
- Helpless 24%

More boys than girls felt vengeful and this trend was reversed on self pity. 49.8% of bullies felt sorry after concurrently reporting (40.6%) that they felt indifferent. 20.9% reported feeling satisfied while 52.7% of girls and 48.8% of boys reported feeling sorry.

In a study by Cefai and Cooper (2006) on Social and Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) it is evident that such difficulties have become a cause for concern among various stakeholders due to their increasing frequency. Episodes of violence against teachers in a number of schools in Malta are rare and extreme forms of violent student behaviour in schools. However, they underline a concern about the increasing rates of violence, anti social behaviour, bullying in Maltese schools. Studies in UK schools indicate that the increase is mostly in the primary sector (Parsons 1999 as in Cooper and Cefai, 2006). According to 2004-2008 annual report of the National Board for School Behaviour, there were 34 referrals from state schools of excessive behavioural problems i.e. 0.07% of school population (Psaila, 2005). Between 2000 and 2005, 811 children and young persons used the services for young children with very challenging behaviour. (75% were males and 25% females). (Pisani et al 2006 cited in Cooper and Cefai, 2006).

In France and UK, the governments have invested significant resources to tackle school violence or disaffection, truancy and exclusion. The January 2000 Allègre action plan included thousands of

extra posts, including 2000 emplois jeunes (unqualified adult helpers); 4000 aides éducateurs (assistant youth workers); 800 surveillants (young supervisory staff); and 1000 liaison workers linking schools with communities. These resources were targeted in 10 areas and within these areas 75 schools received special police protection (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2000). Schools are required to record details of incidents of violence, though the ministry dropped the weekly monitoring of data, suggested for some schools, in early 2001. A large proportion of these poorly paid and unqualified staff is likely to be recruited from black and minority ethnic communities. Their lowly and subordinate position within schools tends to reinforce what one commentator has termed the 'continuing colonialism of institutions' (Pain, 2000, our translation).

French governments of right and left are wedded to a view of Republican neutrality, laïcité that refuses to allow for ethnic difference as a factor in educational achievement. Whilst strongly supportive of antiracism as an element of personal action, official discourse is disinclined to acknowledge the possibility of institutional racism within the education system.

As regards the reporting of harassment by the victims, in Spain there are large differences between the studies carried out in 2000 and those carried out 2006. In the latter study, the victims tend less to tell their friends of their experience although this remains the majority option in both studies (67.1% and 60.4% respectively). Nevertheless, the percentage of victims who report facts to teachers has increased considerably (from 8.9% to 14.2%). Another positive aspect reveals that the victims who tell nobody are on the decrease, from 16.6% to 11.2%.

Finally, because of the significant increase in students of foreign origins entering the Spanish education system in recent years, it is important that we emphasize the introduction of the "national origin" variable.

An opinion expressed by a judge in Granada, very popular in Spain, is about "to teach by example and service to the community and strongly support that the best to lead a child is education, not merely punishment"

The judge Calatayud stated that 80% of children, who pass through his court take the opportunity of encountering a judge like him and leave, in most cases, the path of crime.

The judge is convinced that his commitment to a philosophy of rehabilitation and education Juvenile win-win. "In Granada we have been three consecutive years down juvenile delinquency."

Cyber-violence: a new form of aggression

Internet, as any other media, presents some problems related to the cyberviolence. Being voluntary or not, the exposition to not proper contents – violent images, racist propaganda or pornography – is generally considered a form of violence. A specific worry arises against the huge exposition of the children to the television without a guiding presence of adults.

A french research (<http://www.webdlambert.com/violence-tv.html>) estimated that before the adolescence a child has the opportunity to witness 20.000 televisual murders.

A comparative analysis allows to discover the direct effect of the televisual violence on the aggressive behaviour. A group of French children (12 years old) aggressor of peers interviewed during a criminal trial affirmed that their favourite Tv programs are series with violent contents.

It has been taken into account the position of some American psychologists (Eron and oth.) whose studies allowed to verify the relationships between the aggressive behaviours and the television.

The relevant element seems to be that the children (aged 6 to 10) still considered what they are watching on Tv very realistic and their television heroes are used to act in aggressive way.

A French research evaluated the difference between boys and girls. The first group prefer programs less violent and this attitude influence a lot its behaviour.

The organization e-enfance defined some areas of risk for the children surfing the Net, defined as followed:

The involuntary exposition to shocking images 3 children out of 10 are voluntary or not put in relation with shocking contents on the Net, generally looking for sites where it is possible even if illegally downloading music or movies. Source : Etude Ipsos/e-enfance 2009

Psychological Pressure Vulnerable Children can be influenced by evil-minded surfers minors or adults (sexual aggressions, incitation to the anorexia, to the suicide...) to whom they are in touch using the chats. Furthermore, children are used to accept rendez-vous offered by their new "amis virtuels", and that can be dangerous.

Defaming blogs Freedom of expression on internet implies certain rules that parents and

children have to be taken into account. Any child publishing contents in a blog has to be aware about the responsibility coming from the publication.

Divulgence of personal data through blogs and chats Children are used to not be aware about the vulnerability of their personal data in internet and in many cases they publish confidential informations (the name of the school they attend, the mobile number, etc...).

Excessive exposition: particularly games on console or internet. Children can suffer problems coming from an excessive exposition that in extreme terms can lead to a de-socializing behaviour.

6. A study on violence among children at school. Introduction.

Studies in this field have shown that bullying, aggressive and violent behaviour rarely occur in the presence of teachers, be it in or outside of school. Bullies are usually 'well behaved' in class or at least when they are seen by an adult (Pellegrini & Bartini 2000). In this connection, Henry (2006) points out that teachers are not reliable in the same way as children in detecting such behaviour since, as shown in Whitney & Smith's research (1993), more than half of children between the ages of 8 and 16 who have been victims of aggression at school never reported it to their teachers. Hiding such occurrence from adults is a good reason to ask children how much do they know about the phenomenon, how do they live it and how do they feel about it. As a forerunner of this methodology Piaget (1969,1977) was followed by many other researchers such as Mahoney (1991) and Neimeyer & Mahoney (1995).

Latest researches have also shown that "there is more and more evidence in the validation of the reliability of answers given by children and therefore the scientific validation of studies based on self-report by children aged 6-12. This does not only concern the acts *per se* but also their emotional response (Mash & Terdal 1988; Kazdin & Weisz 2003).

Violent and aggressive behaviour among peers in school is a widespread phenomenon worldwide (Berger,2007).

The aim of a bully is always that of hurting the victim (Olweus, 1991, 1993). A bully's actions are repeated over time and include psychical and/or verbal bullying (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1993) and relational bullying (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992;. Crick e Grotpeter, 1995; Wolke et al,

2000) where peers harm others through purposeful manipulation and damaging of their peer relationship.

There is usually an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim: the act occurs in specific circumstances and is not seen by a teacher, other children assist and each of them have a set role (accomplice, defender of the victim, bystander etc.).

Salmivalli et al. (1996) suggest that in the case of repeated acts of violence all the class is in some way responsible. Even those who watch or know and do not intervene nor report it to an adult. Literature shows that boys are usually more involved in violent events than girls. Girls are more 'protectors' of the victim (Andreou & Metallidou, 2004; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Lagerspetz et al, 1982; Menesini et al, 2003; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989; Salmivalli et al, 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999). Moreover, boys are more involved in psychical bullying and girls in relational bullying (Andreou & Metallidou, 2004; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Eagly, 1987; Olweus, 1993).

Many researchers agree on the need to involve all the class through programmes purposefully designed to contain bullying (Andreou et al, 2007; Salmivalli, 1999, 2001; Salmivalli et al, 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999) by explaining to the children which is their role and in what measure witnessing without intervening could help the repeating of such violent occurrence. Most studies on this subject have used anonymous self-report tools (questionnaires and drawings) in order to help children to recount exactly these acts of violence. It appears that bullies often do not realise the damage caused by their actions (Castro et al., 2002), and that children who are passive bystanders (outsiders) are instead not always aware that their behaviour contributes in supporting such violence (Stevens et al., 2000; Comodeca and Goossens, 2005; Salmivalli, 2001) and are less keen in changing their attitude by reporting the culprits (Junoven et al, 2003). Verbal and social bullying (ridiculing) are not always considered violent acts (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Craig et al, 2001). However, it is nowadays generally agreed that research carried out on children needs multi-faceted strategies (Pellegrini, 2001). In the case of violence among peers at school for example it is paramount to involve also parents, teachers, non teaching school staff and the children themselves. It is also advisable to use more than one tool, e.g. questionnaires *and* drawings (Bosacki et al., 2006).

The study of violent acts at school often shows a number of difficulties in data gathering.

Therefore, here is a list of possible methods to be used:

- I. Reports by both teachers and parents, although their usefulness is limited since often parents and teachers are not fully aware of the phenomenon.
- II. Descriptions by the children who have been victims or have somehow been involved in violent acts, retrieved from the anonymous questionnaires. The most common questionnaires are Olweus (Olweus, 1993), *Life in Schools* (Arora, 1994), Rigby and Slee (1991) and that on the role of the participants Salmivalli (1996).
- III. Drawings: which will be examined later on.
- IV. Behavioural direct observation (e.g. in recess areas). Pepler and Craig (1995) for example, use radio microphones and a long lens video cameras. This type of observation is extremely valid although expensive and requires a lot of time to organise.
- V. Direct interviews, focus groups with 4-8 students and the reports of violent acts occurred at school.

Objective

The objective of this research is to measure the violence as perceived by children and by all other people involved in education such as teachers, parents and non teaching staff.

Research hypothesis lies in the notion that violent behaviour in primary school is a quite frequent occurrence, more than one expects, and some of these episodes which adults consider trivial are instead important for children.

Methods and tools

A research on the socio-affective sphere in education, i.e. the perception of violence amongst peers, can use several tools such as observation and questionnaires. Drawings are also another tool, usually employed with young children although useful also with adolescents.

However, in this research observation has not been used due to its complexity and the difficulty of training specialised profiles. Therefore, we have used questionnaires which are easier to present since they supply statistically accessible and comparable results. Drawings have been shown only to

children attending the 1st and 2nd year of primary school.

Many research studies have used questionnaires to analyse the phenomenon of bullying at school (Olweus, 1996; Fonzi, 1997; Mancini 1999). The questionnaire is a sequence of pre-set questions requesting written answers and addressed to a single respondent. To each question, the respondent may indicate his/her own experience.

Questionnaires are “research instruments for the purpose of gathering information; they are a set of pre-defined questions devised according to the type of answers i.e. “closed-ended” questions where the respondent must choose from a list of possible answers close to his/her opinion and/or “open-ended” questions which do not require pre-set answers to choose from” (Zammuner, 1996).

The questionnaire is part of a research process which defines beforehand:

- I. Objectives (what is being investigated);
- II. Structure (the type of questions, the way they are presented, their sequence, the choice of answers – open-ended/closed-ended);
- III. Target (whom the questions are addressed to);
- IV. Administration (when – in our case at the end of the school year; how - who proposes it and how it is going to be presented);
- V. Assessment of results (statistical analysis);
- VI. Presentation of results.

Structuring the Pro-Save questionnaire

1. Objectives

The objective of the Pro-save project is to measure the perception of violence in schools among children between 6 and 14 years of age. It measures how they classify their own behaviour and that of others in terms of aggressiveness and violence. We have deemed important to assess also the perception of teachers, parents and the school non teaching staff.

It is an investigative research with no precise hypothesis to be verified, but it stems from general knowledge interest. It follows a series of guidelines advancing partial hypothesis during its progress based on elements which cannot be set *a priori*.

This investigative research could be followed by a time-series survey to assess possible changes in perception in the target group after a session carried out between the two surveys.

2. Structure

The structure of the questionnaire is simple: there are no extended and complex explanations; questions are simple, easy to understand and designed according to the respondent's age. In the case of children we have based our questionnaire on the data from Buzzi & Ongari's research (1989) which focused on the relationship children-media-advertisement. This research proposed to integrate the questionnaire with cartoons since it is effective in reducing the time to answer the questions, in involving better the respondent and in achieving more coherent answers (Buzzi & Ongari, 1993). Integrating cartoons not only made the questionnaire more entertaining and closer to the respondents' world (the media, their language, videogames etc) but it made it less impersonal: cartoons are tools particularly close to a child's imagination and language; they can be easily decoded without requiring any specific hermeneutic competence; their iconic-visual traits stimulate a less rigid communication environment compared to the linear structure of reading (Tirocchi & Prattichizzo, 2005, p. 39).

In the case of children, the respondents were divided into three age groups: 6-7; 8-9; 10-over. We then devised specific questionnaires for teachers, parents and non teaching staff in schools.

The questionnaire often presents a series of questions and cartoons developed according to the type of format (open-ended/close-ended). Each questionnaire opens with a section for filling in personal data followed by the proper survey. The latter focuses on two main aspects: the victim's reaction to violence and his/her emotional response.

The list of reactions to choose from were: did not feel hurt by the aggression, felt hurt and reacted, felt hurt but gave in. The victim's emotional response could be: happiness, sadness, anger, indifference, fear, shame.

According to the respondent's age, we also tried to obtain further information through open-ended questions which prompted comments about the school environment in terms of violence, i.e. the respondent's personal experiences.

We also proposed to smaller children (6-7 years) to draw a design without purposely giving them any preliminary instructions. They were asked to draw it immediately after the introduction of the issue of violence and bullying at school. The aim was to leave the child free to draw whatever he/she wished and measure the importance of the issue according to the picture.

We took particular care in developing the questions so that they would not be ambiguous, biased or misinterpretable. The instructions to teachers on handing out the questionnaire were made as clear and concise as possible. The questionnaire to adult respondents (teachers, parents, non teaching school staff) had a short and clear explanation at the top of the first page.

In order to leave the questionnaire as 'light' as possible we did not include *repeated or trick questions* (Furnham, Henderson 1982)- i.e. questions which would have repeated content in different phrasing -, in order to assess the reliability of the answers.

We assessed also all the possible 'distortions' in the answers the questionnaires may incur; respondents could give untrue answers for the following reasons:

- ➡ to give a better image of oneself, thus not answering truthfully. Therefore, the questionnaires were anonymous.
- ➡ to boycott the questionnaire by giving deliberate illogical answers. This is quite rare with adult respondents but it is possible with children. In the set of answers related to the emotions felt by the victim, we therefore included "happiness" since it is not possible to associate this emotion to a violent situation.
- ➡ to avoid that the respondent take a neutral position and not clarify what he/she really thinks. This is rare with children who tend to be spontaneous and decisive in their answers; while it can happen with adult respondents, even though the questionnaire is anonymous. Therefore, our questionnaire to adult respondents followed the format of a 4-level Likert scale since the middle option of "Neither agree nor disagree" is not available.

Questions with open-ended answers were added to widen the acquisition of information despite data assessment would be more difficult. However, we devised questions as neutral as possible in order to avoid hints.

The close-ended answers had the advantage to be automatically referable to pre-set categories, thus making the data processing easier.

We selected the most typical and frequent answers in order to make sure that there would always be one the respondent could choose.

A first 'pilot' questionnaire (pre-test) built on this research, was devised by a focus group (two psychologists, an anthropologist, a trainer and a sociologist) and handed out to a subset of target respondents of both children and adults.

The pre-test group was composed of: 6 children (6-7 years: 3 boys and 3 girls), 6 children (8-9 years: 3 boys and 3 girls), 6 children (10-11-12 years: 3 boys and 3 girls), 4 elementary school teachers (2 men and 2 women), 4 non teaching staff (2 men and 2 women), 4 parents of children attending elementary school (2 men and 2 women). Our aim was to assess comprehensibility, simplicity and easiness of the answers and to amend possible misinterpretations, unnecessary and missing questions, confusing or inappropriate answers etc. The purpose of this stage was to encourage the respondents to comment the questions and their answers in order to find criticalities in the tool and amend them to reach the final version of the questionnaire.

3. Target group

The target group was composed of students, parents, teachers and non teaching staff and the research involved seven countries: Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Malta, Romania, Greece and Slovenia. The questionnaires were translated into English and forwarded to all the partners in the project who in turn translated them into their own language.

4. Administration

The questionnaires were handed out in May-June 2011, at the end of school term since the children attending the first year of elementary school had by then mastered enough competences to be able to read and write and therefore be able to answer the questionnaire.

5. Assessment of results

For the processing of data we used descriptive statistics to be able to synthesize both quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the target respondents. Then we analysed the variations and frequency and represented them on bar and pie charts. Through a contingency table we cross tabulated the answers to two or more questions (e.g. gender and level of seriousness) in order to describe their variations.

When selecting the cartoons shown on the children's questionnaire, a part from the theme of violence, the classic parameters regarding the interpretation of a drawing (age, gender, the picture's spatial collocation) we also took into consideration specific variables such as the number of characters, their role (aggressor, victim, accomplice, spectator), the aggressor's and the victim's gender, the type of aggression (physical or verbal), the aggressor's intent (to exclude, bully, humiliate), the aggressor's emotional response (satisfaction, anger), the victim's response (accepting, responding, being calm), the victim's emotional response (sadness, anger, shame, fear, surprise). All these elements were in addition to a number of classic parameters used for the interpretation of the drawings.

Our interpretation was based on this kind of processing and was followed by reasoned comments in order to understand the meaning of all the figures and calculations.

6. Presentation

The presentation of the results was shown on charts with brief comments.

Drawings have been recognised for a long time as being valid tools to depict children's emotional feelings since they are one of the most important ways of expressing themselves (Malchiodi 1998). Drawing is part of a child's development process (Kleprch & Irvin, 1982; Hammer 1997). In fact, as early as one year of age children can already use paper and colours to doodle. From this very moment they use drawings as a proper alternative language to express their emotions, thoughts and feelings even before speaking. (Godnan 1979; Leibowitz 1999; Moschini 2005). Malchiodi (1998) believes that drawings reflect the child's inner world and interpersonal style. Drawing is a projective language free from any rational limitation; it is in fact widely used both in children and adult psychotherapy (Leibowitz 1999) and has proved to be a very efficient diagnostic tool (Cordell & Bergman-Meador 1991).

Through drawing, children show the perception they have of the world and the way to face it (Burns, 1982; Hammer 1997; Moschini 2005). This is a valid reason to use it also in a research study such as the ProSAVE project: children find it difficult to identify and verbally express emotions and feelings since they may lack the right words and they may not have cognitive processing competences to express themselves. Through drawing, children overcome these limitations

(Hammer 1997).

Moschini (2005) is of the opinion that the use of art as language is devoid of any external influence and is actually more reliable than what children feel.

This does not mean that interpreting a drawing is not a complex operation. Whoever analyses a drawing must be very careful not to use a personal vision of the world and one's own values to explain shapes and colours. In order to avoid any 'wild' interpretations and for a correct analysis certain parameters and indications should be followed: the human figure, the house, the trees and the family. These parameters are commonly used in medical diagnosis (Berger 1994), keeping in mind that a drawing is *per se* an imprecise tool which must be used together with other tools such as interviews, questionnaires etc. (Thomas & Jolley, 1998).

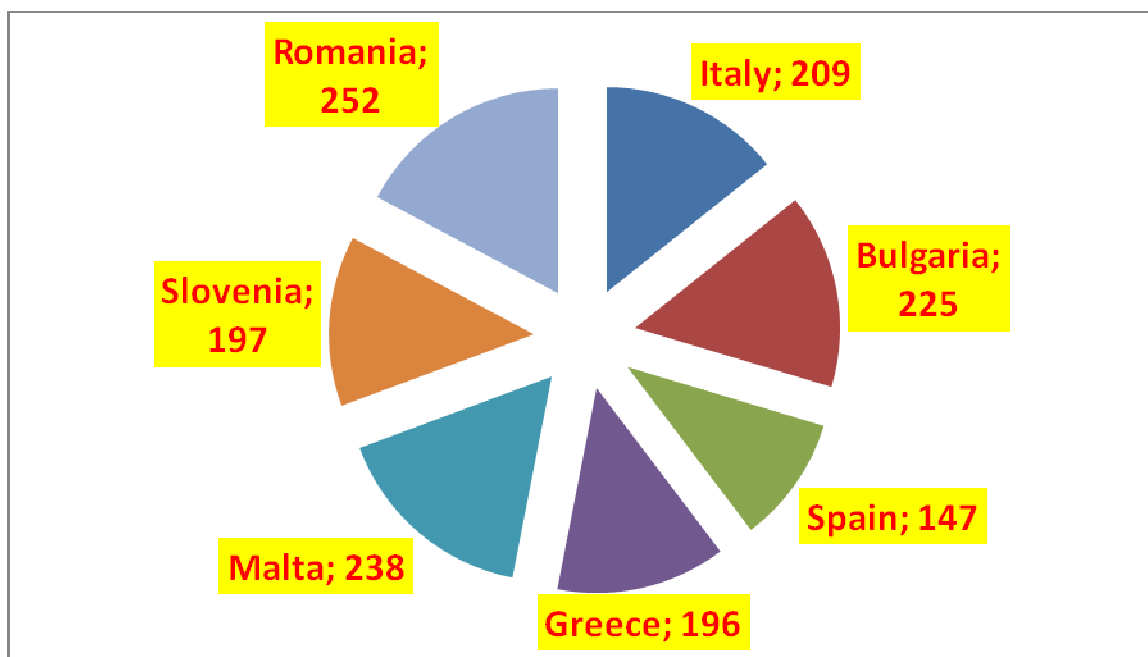
When analysing a drawing we should consider the following: the position of the figure (centre-right-left-top-bottom), its size, the kind of stroke (light, heavy, flowing, interrupted), the colours (Sherry & Klein, 1975; Leibowitz, 1999; Moschini, 2005; Schilkroust *et al.*, 1972; Ronen & Ayelet, 2001). Regarding the content, children usually represent their own world or better their way of conceiving and conceptualizing reality (Ronen 2003). In fact, from the expression of the characters we can determine information about the child's feelings (Knell 1993). Whenever possible, it is important that the drawing be followed by a brief conversation with the child to acquire precious information in order to avoid errors of interpretation (Kelly, 1955).

Target groups

I – Children

The children taking part in the research were 1,464 divided into three age groups (there were 3 different questionnaires): 6-7 years (450), 8-9 years (463), 10 - over (551).

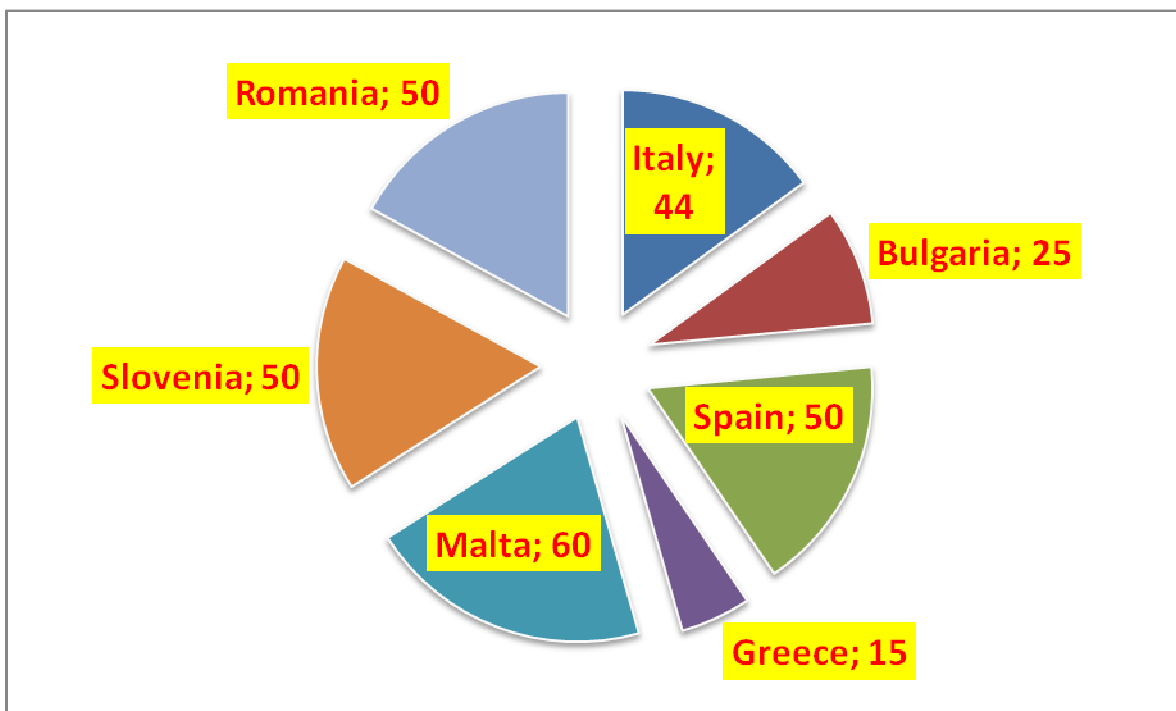
61% of the target group was female. The children came from 7 different countries as shown in the pie-chart.



1

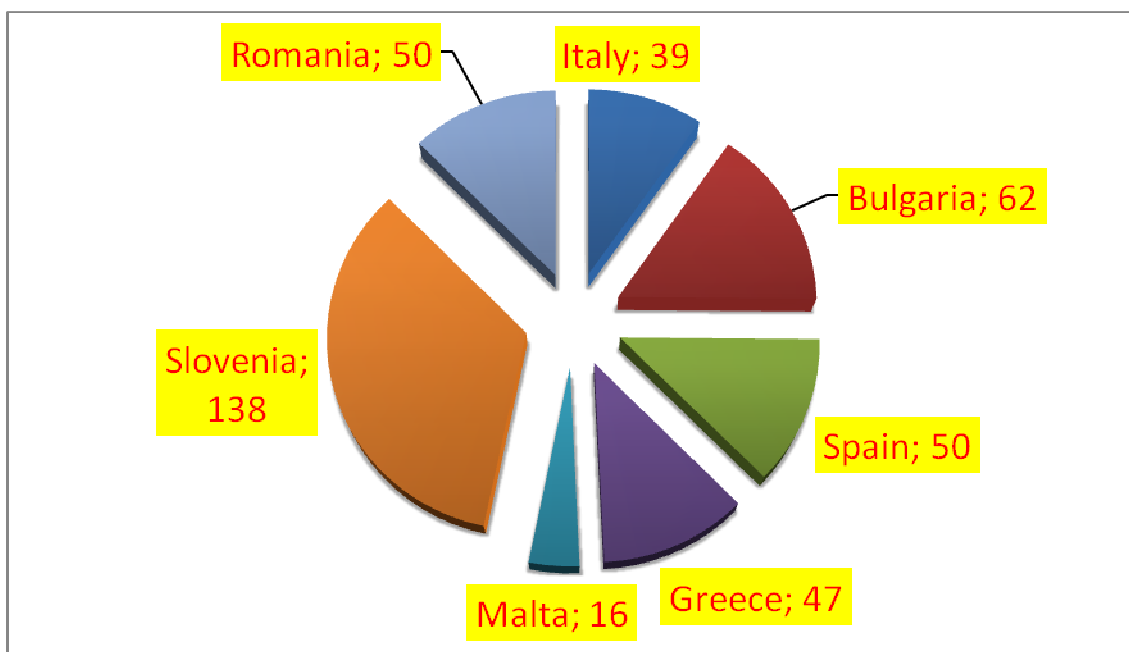
II – Parents

The parents who answered the questionnaire were 294 of which 77% were the mothers (average age 39, education: A-levels/degree, number of family members: 3-4). The following pie-chart shows geographical reference to the above data.



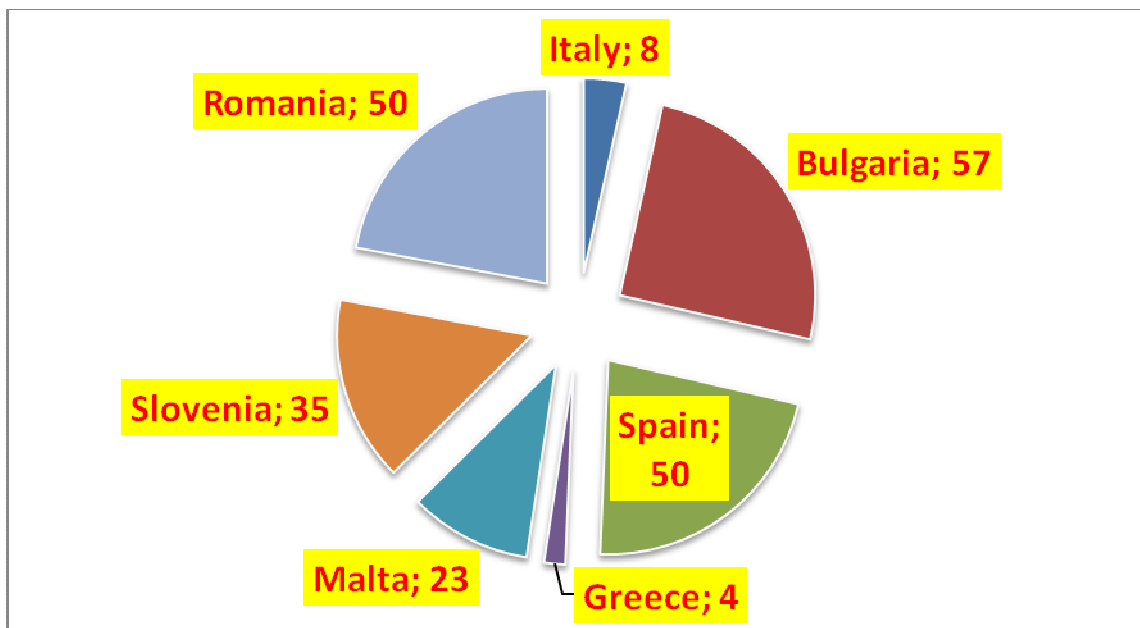
III – Teachers

The teachers were 402 of which 84% were women (average age 42 with 17 years of teaching experience). See following pie chart for geographical reference.



IV – Non teaching staff

227 respondents of which 72% were women (average age 41 with 12 years of service). See following pie chart for geographical reference.



Results and comments

After gathering the data from the questionnaires for children we codified and organised the answers on an excel file taking into account the Country, Age, Gender and Class.

We did the same with the questionnaires for the teachers and the non teaching staff adding the data regarding teaching years, classes and subject taught. Data on the questionnaires for the parents included Country, Age, Gender, Education, Number of family members, age and gender of child.

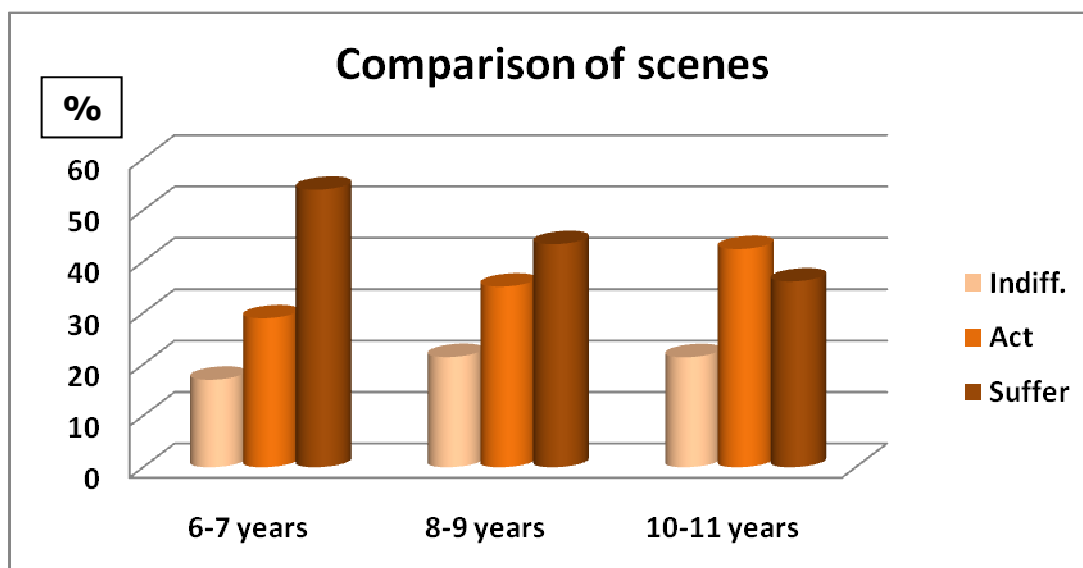
I – Children

The first thing that emerges from the data gathered is that the majority of children stated to have witnessed or taken part in bullying episodes in school. The data shows small variations within age groups.

	6-7	8-9	10 - over
Witnessed/participated	86%	89%	92%
Have not witnessed/participated	14%	11%	8%

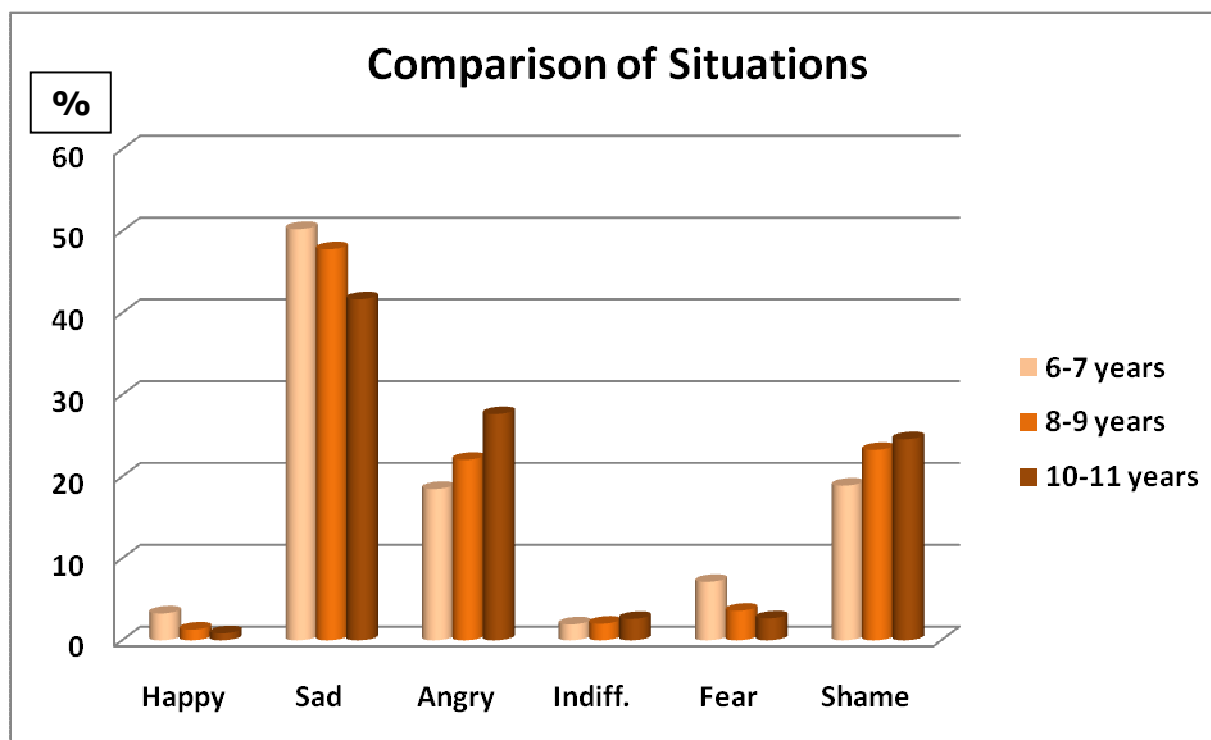
It is interesting to note that the percentage of those who state having never witnessed or taken part in bullying episodes decreases with age. It would have been interesting assessing also if this trend continued in age groups over and below those studied.

The questionnaire showed a series of cartoons depicting episodes of bullying among peers. The children had to choose from three options (indifference, reaction, passive suffering) and state which of these would be the victim’s behaviour. The results are shown in the following bar chart.



We can see differences in the age group: the variable 'Suffer' (meant as 'passive suffering') tends to decrease with age and be replaced by 'Action', i.e. an active reaction to violence from another. The options of reaction were to become violent (pictures 1 and 4) or asking the bully to explain his/her behaviour (pictures 2 and 3).

The questionnaire gave also 3 different potentially violent situations: the child had to choose from 6 options what would the victim have felt after the aggression. The emotional responses to choose from were 6: happiness, sadness, anger, indifference, fear, shame. The following chart shows the overall results.



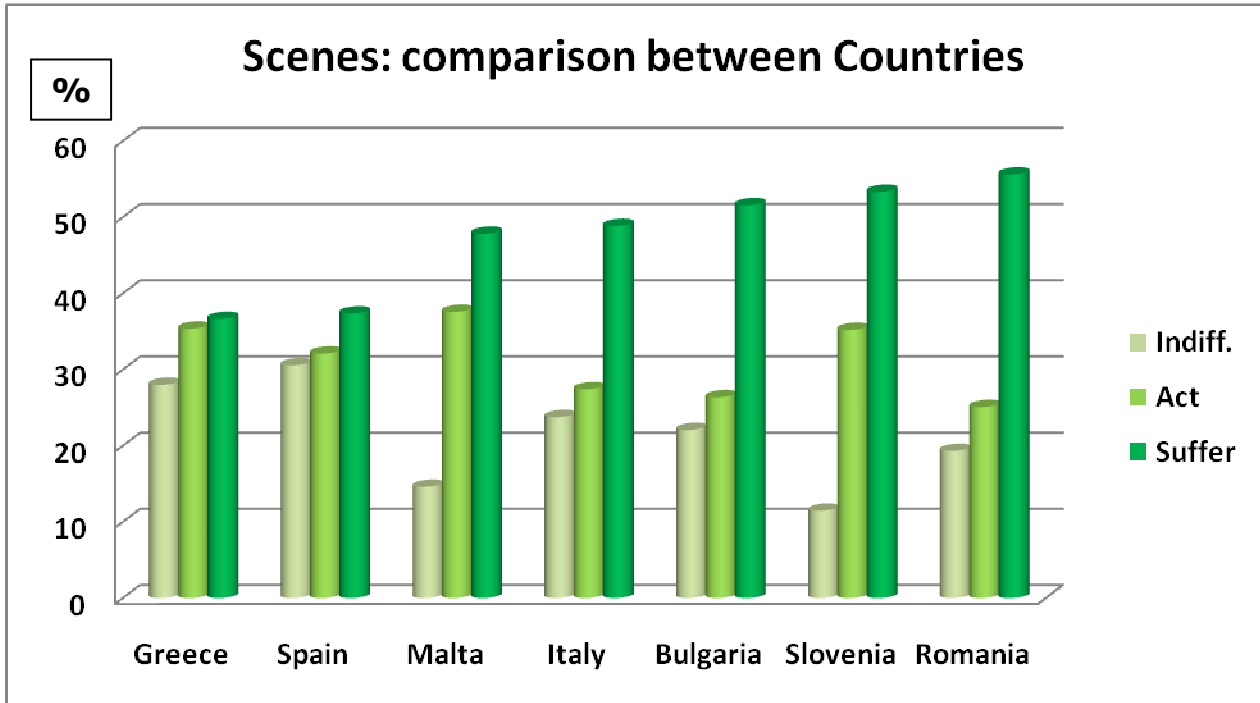
The most frequent choice is 'sadness', followed by 'rage' and 'shame'. Fear shows a very low percentage, however it increases in younger children.

It is important to note the minimal percentage of respondents who chose 'indifference'. This confirms that the bullying episodes are not undervalued by children. Particularly important is also the interaction of the variables 'sad', 'angry', and 'shame': the first decreases while the other two increase according to age. This means that the older the child is the more probable is his/her aggressive reaction as a victim and his/her feeling of shame to be in such a situation. Sadness, however, remains the main emotional response throughout all age groups.

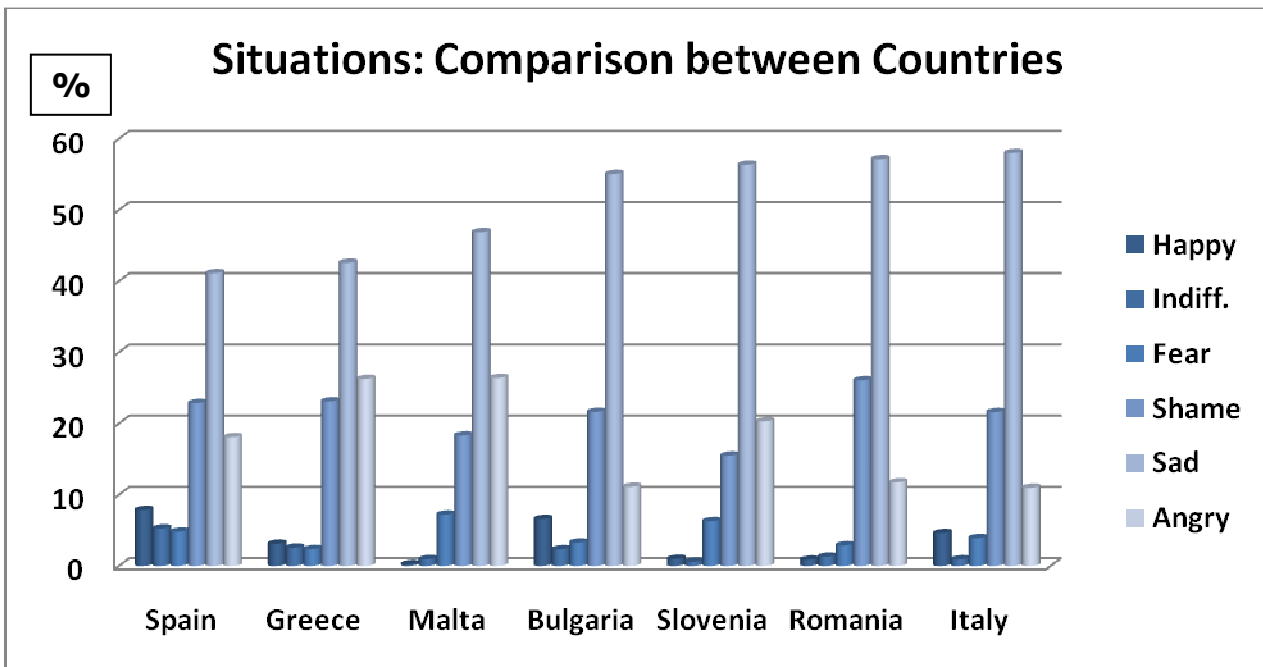
The following bar chart shows the comparison among countries regarding the selections from the 3 cartoons in the questionnaire. Here there are marked differences from country to country. The answer 'Suffer', for example, is higher in Slovenia and Romania compared with Greece and Spain. The seven countries show the common variable 'suffer' being the one mostly chosen by the respondents.

This result underlines the emotional trait children show in front of violence: their first reaction is a sense of powerless suffering and dejection. The cartoons in the questionnaire depicted 'everyday' situations in school, commonly considered to be not that serious. Yet, the respondents

stressed its importance when they could have chosen 'indifferent' as the victim's emotional response.



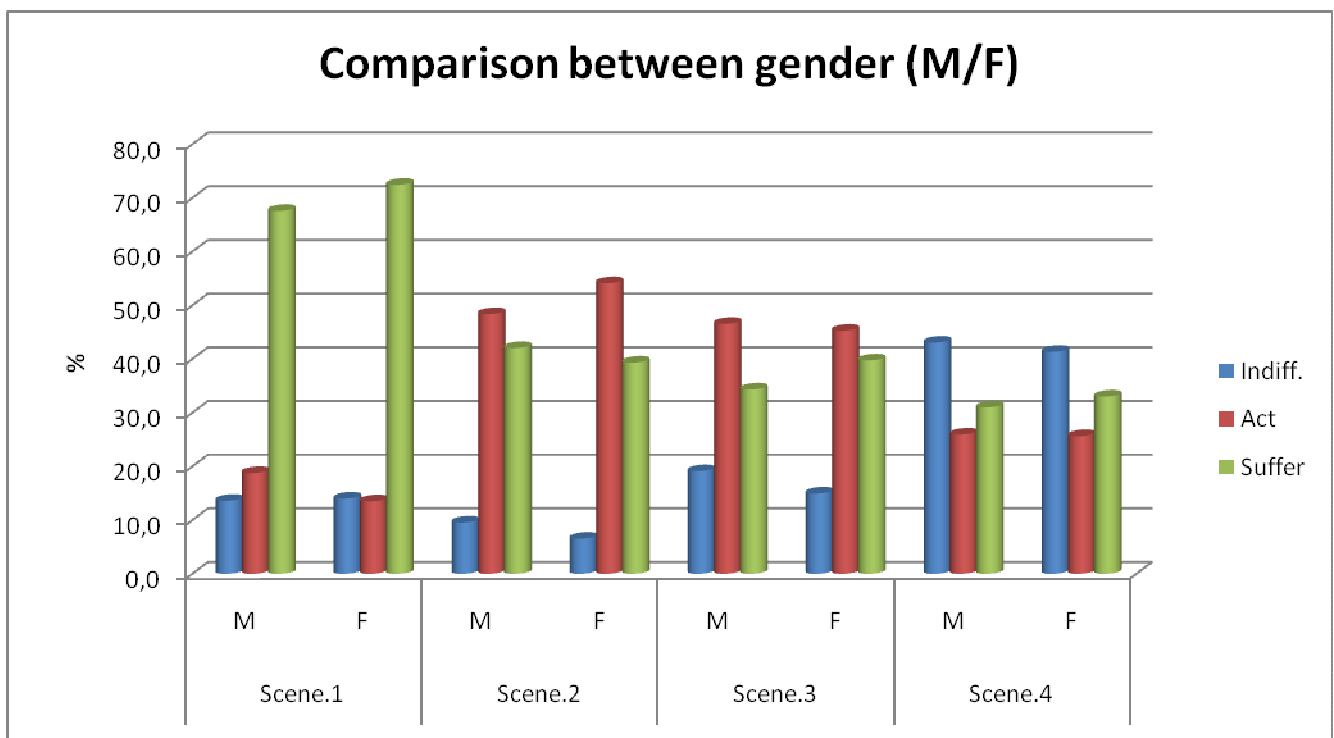
The following bar chart shows the comparative results among the countries of the 4 situations described in the questionnaire.



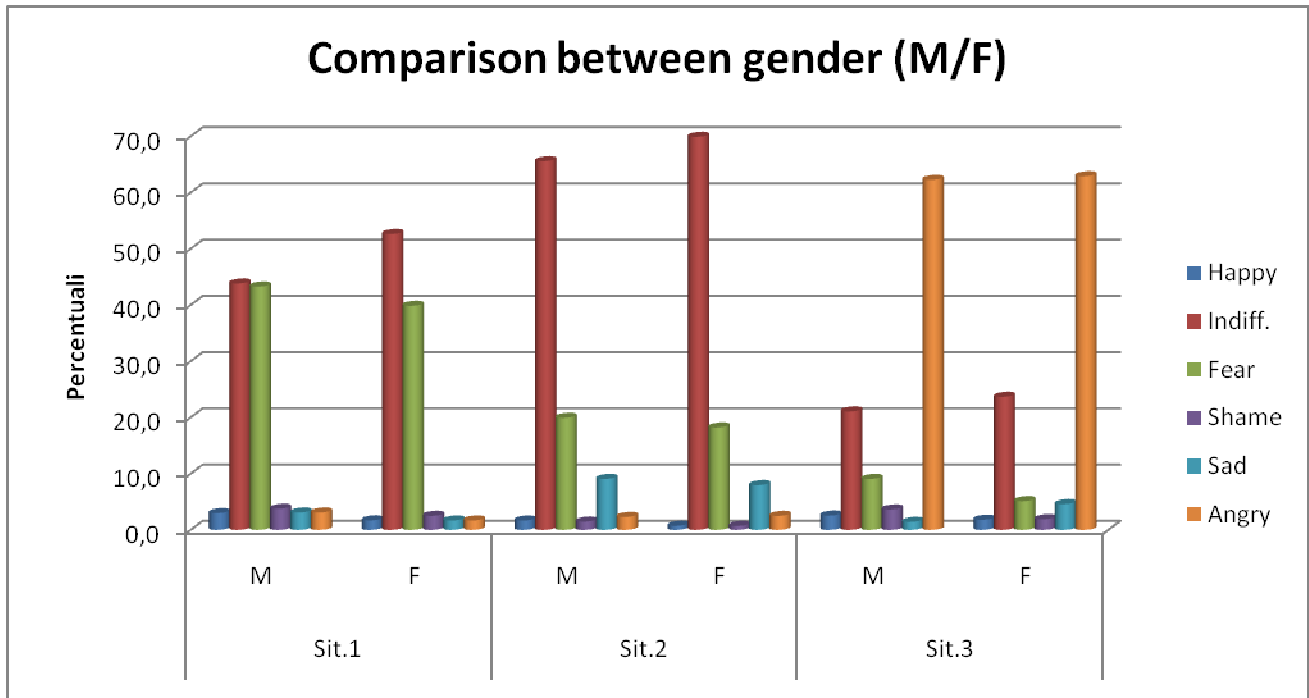
What has been previously said for 'suffer' is also confirmed for 'sad': this emotional response is the first in all countries although with some differences. Next to sadness we have anger and shame. Indifference shows a low percentage as does happiness. We have already explained why the latter variable was inserted.

The combination of the two bar charts definitely shows that a victim's aggressive emotional response establishes a sense of powerlessness and sadness. This can be said for the majority of children in all countries. The phenomenon is not underrated but taken in serious consideration .

The comparison of perception between girls and boys shows that:



There are no remarkable differences between boys and girls in the 4 cartoons regarding the victim's emotional response . This is true for all respondents. The same can be said of the analysis of the 3 age-groups (1st and 2nd grades elementary school; 3rd and 4th grades elementary school, 5th grade elementary school and over) and for the 'Situations' proposed in the questionnaire: there seem to be no differences between boys and girls when choosing the victim's emotional response:

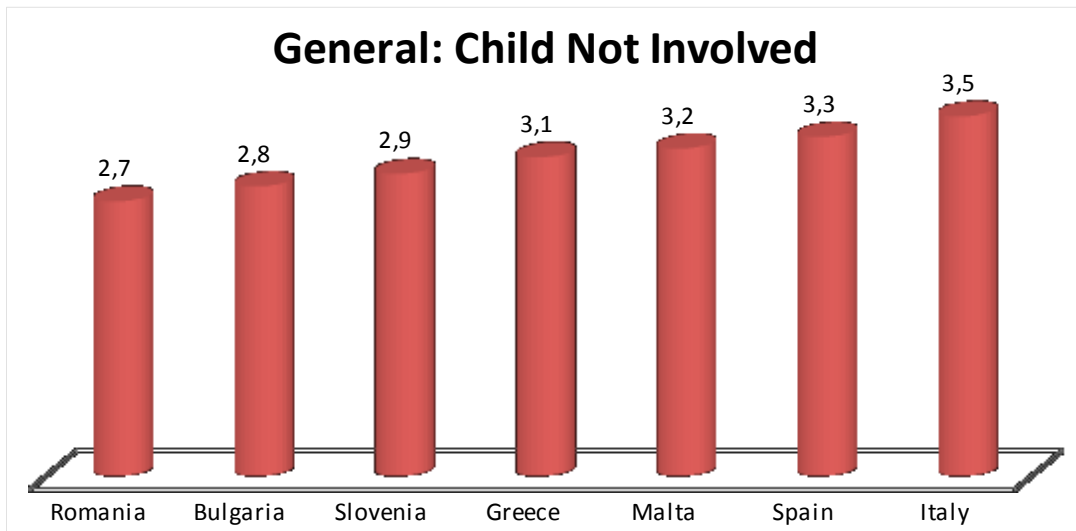


II – Parents

The questionnaire to the parents showed a series of aggressive situations according to 3 possibilities: 1- the child had only witnessed the scene; 2 – the child was the victim; 3 - the child was the aggressor.

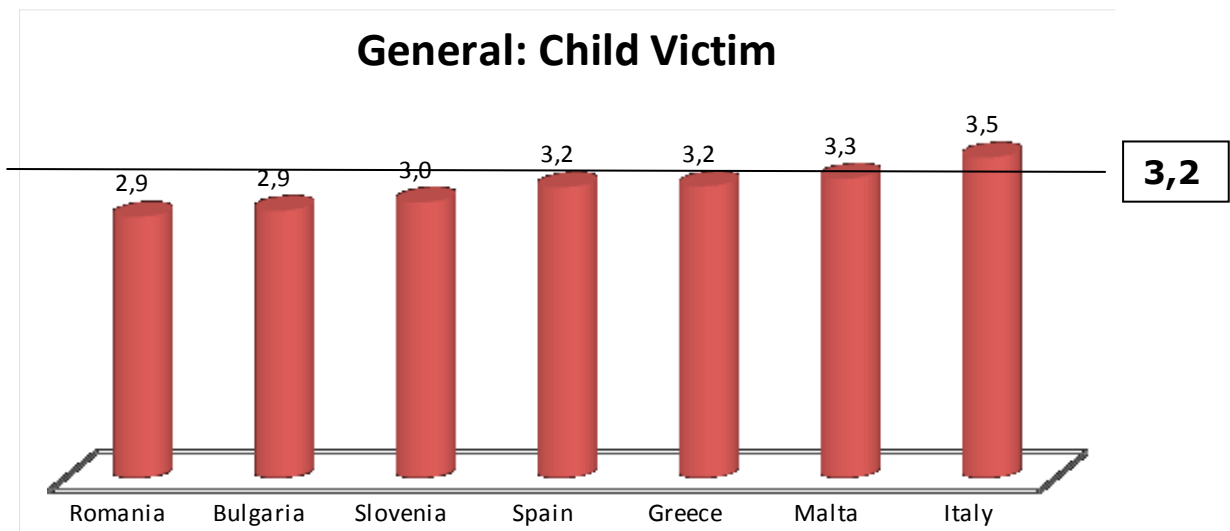
Parents were asked to assess the level of seriousness using a 4-level Likert scale from “not serious at all’ to ‘very serious’. Compared with a 3.1 in general average answers, when the child is only a spectator, the results are the following:

3,1



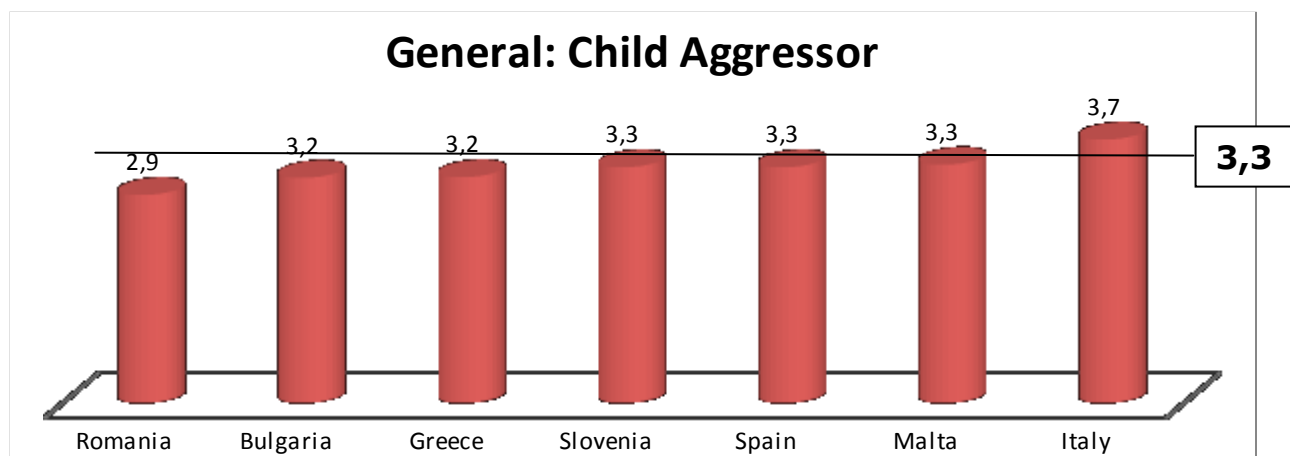
We can clearly see significant differences from one country to another, particularly between Spain and Italy, and between Romania and Bulgaria. In a scale from 1 to 4 the Italian target-group choose mainly 'quite serious' or 'very serious', while in Romania the same episodes were regarded 'quite serious' and 'not very serious'.

Let's see how the trend changes in the hypothesis that a child is the victim:



The general trend increases from 3.1 to 3.2 and shows that with parents the perception of violence rises when their own child is involved. In the comparison among countries the extreme positions remain stable. Italy on one side and Romania at the other extreme. All countries show an

increase of seriousness except Spain which shows a diminishing trend from 3.3 to 3.2.



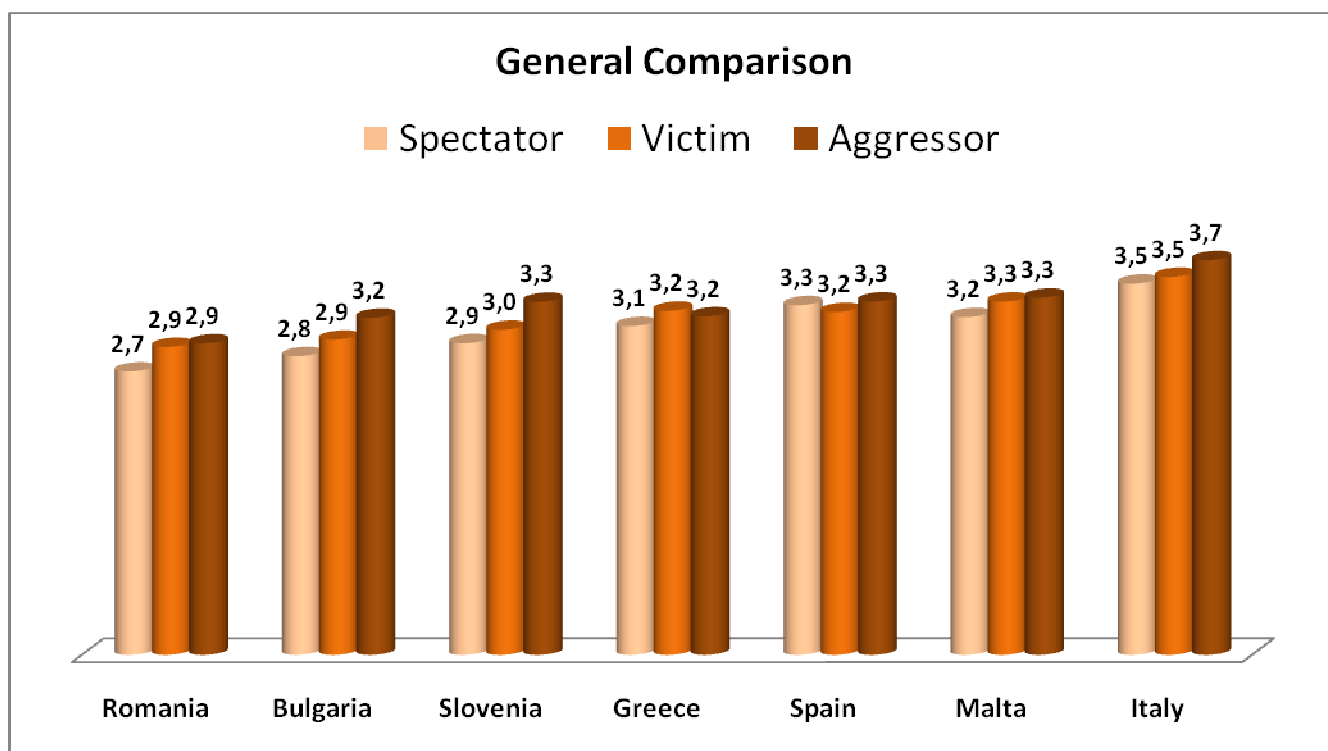
The general trend increases further (3.3) with Italy and Romania at the extremes. The interesting data in this case is that the perception of seriousness rises: said perception changes according to the child's role despite occurring in the same violent episodes.

The perception steadily increases when the child's position changes from spectator to victim and then to aggressor. Why? On the one hand, this can be considered positive: the fact that a parent considers serious that his/her own child is aggressive towards someone else can be read as having a 'punishing' attitude towards such occurrences and therefore in favour of some kind of educational action to prevent his/her own child to be gratuitously aggressive towards someone else.

On the other hand, remains the fact that a parent in some ways supports the child's non-intervention when witnessing violent episodes and is not the protagonist. Considering such occurrences not serious just because one's child is not involved is precisely an indirect endorsement to a "don't want to be involved" attitude.

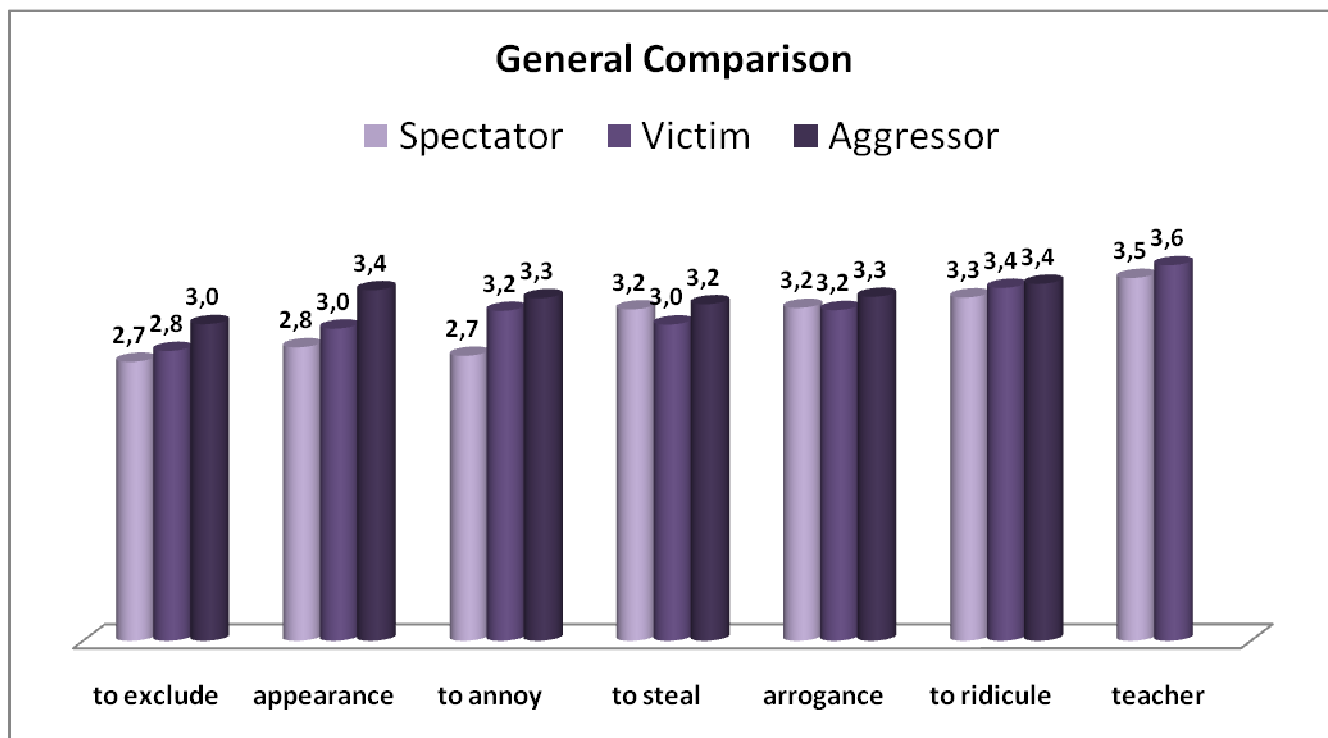
These are considerations worth further debate.

The following bar chart summarises the situation:



Here we can clearly see the similar trend in each country regarding the variables spectator/victim/aggressor. The numbers at the top of each bar show the increasing trend of the average level of seriousness.

A further interesting fact is the analysis of the violent episodes shown to the parents. Six related to: exclusion, mocking one's appearance, annoying, stealing, bullying someone to obtain something, slandering. The sixth episode described the teacher ridiculing a student. The results were the following:



The most serious episode was the sixth one in which a teacher ridiculed a student by displaying his/her lack of proficiency and emphasizing his/her mistakes in front of the class. Particularly serious are also those episodes related to talk behind somebody's back (to ridicule) and to obtain things or favours with menaces (arrogance). Contrary to one's expectation, parents did not consider particularly serious the fact of a child being excluded (e.g. not invited to a party).

We can see from the bar chart that when the child is the negative character in the episodes the perception of seriousness increases.

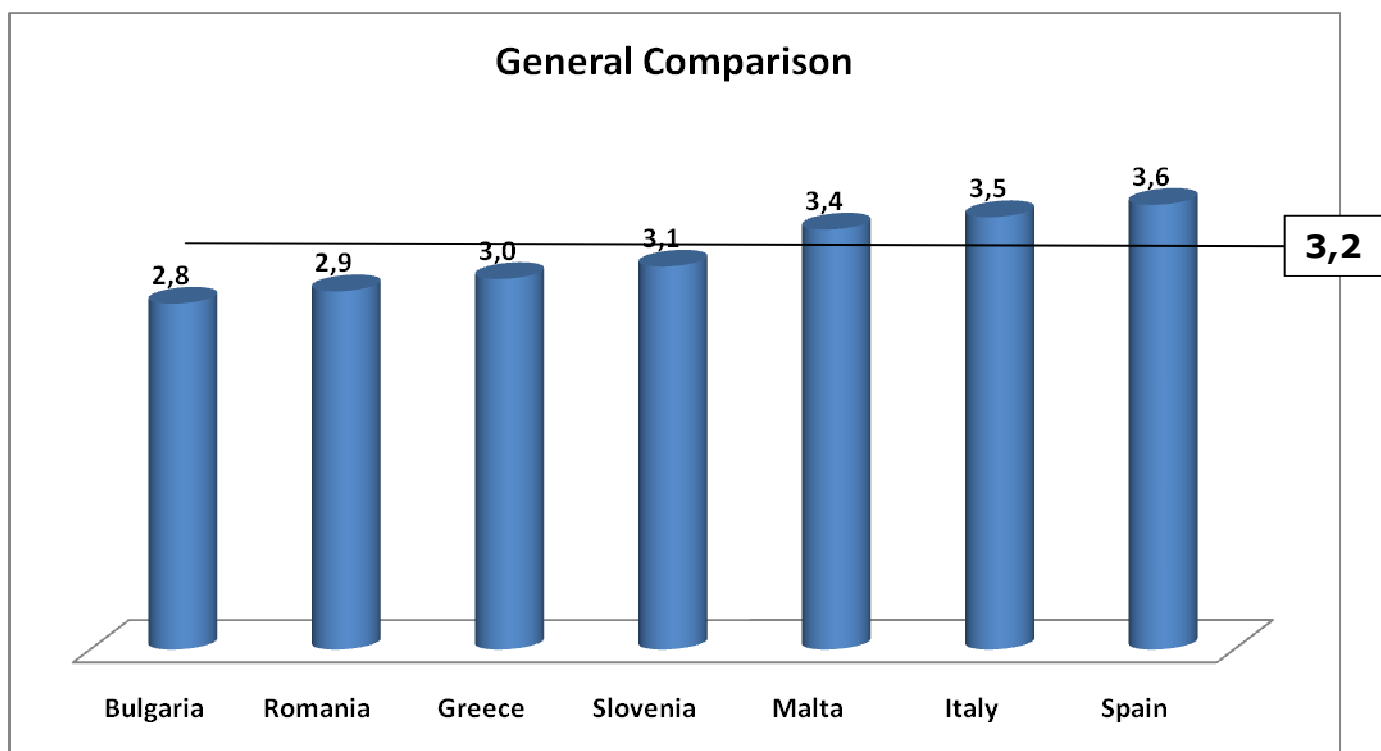
In conclusion, we can determine that parents are particularly attentive to violent episodes which can occur at school. Although with differences among countries, type of episode and role of the child involved, the general trend seems always to be serious (rate 3 and 4) compared with non serious (rate 1 and 2).

III . Teachers

The questionnaire to teachers was similar to that to parents. As we have already said, there were some differences in data requirements since we requested also to state the number of years in

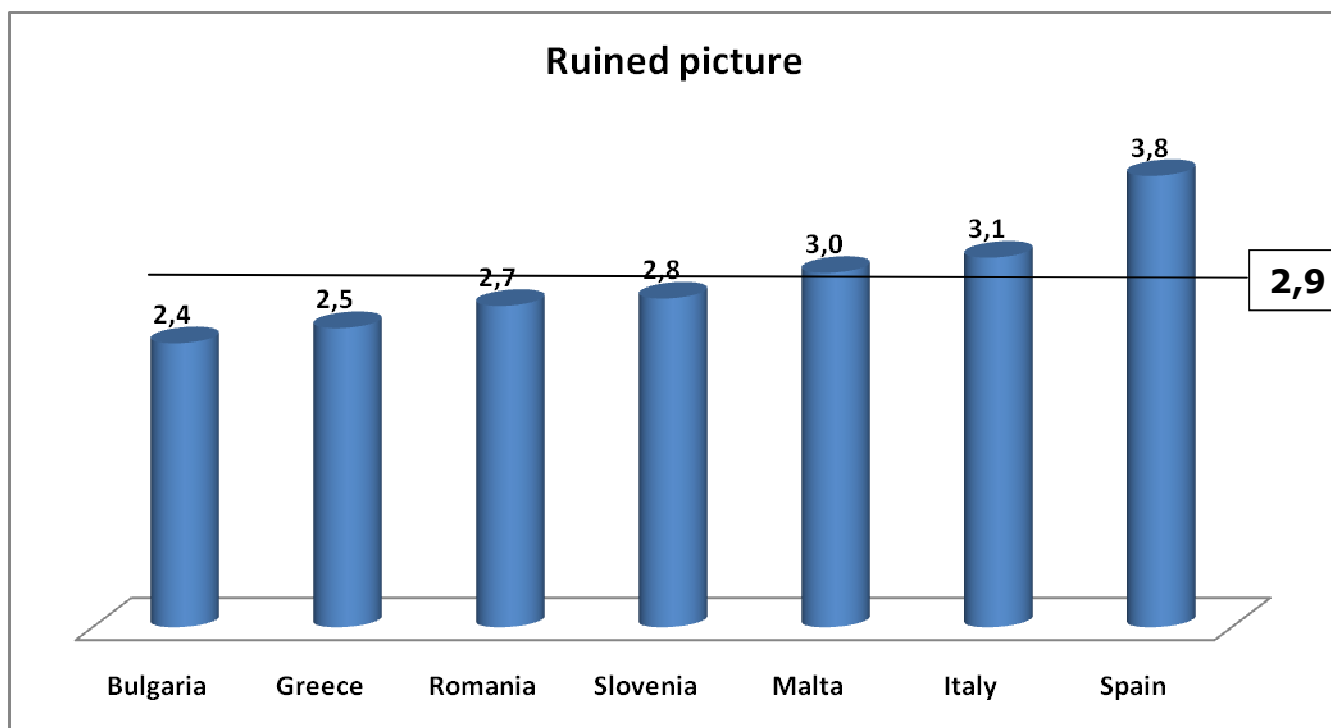
service, the subjects taught and the classes.

The violent episodes proposed were the same. Here follow the results:



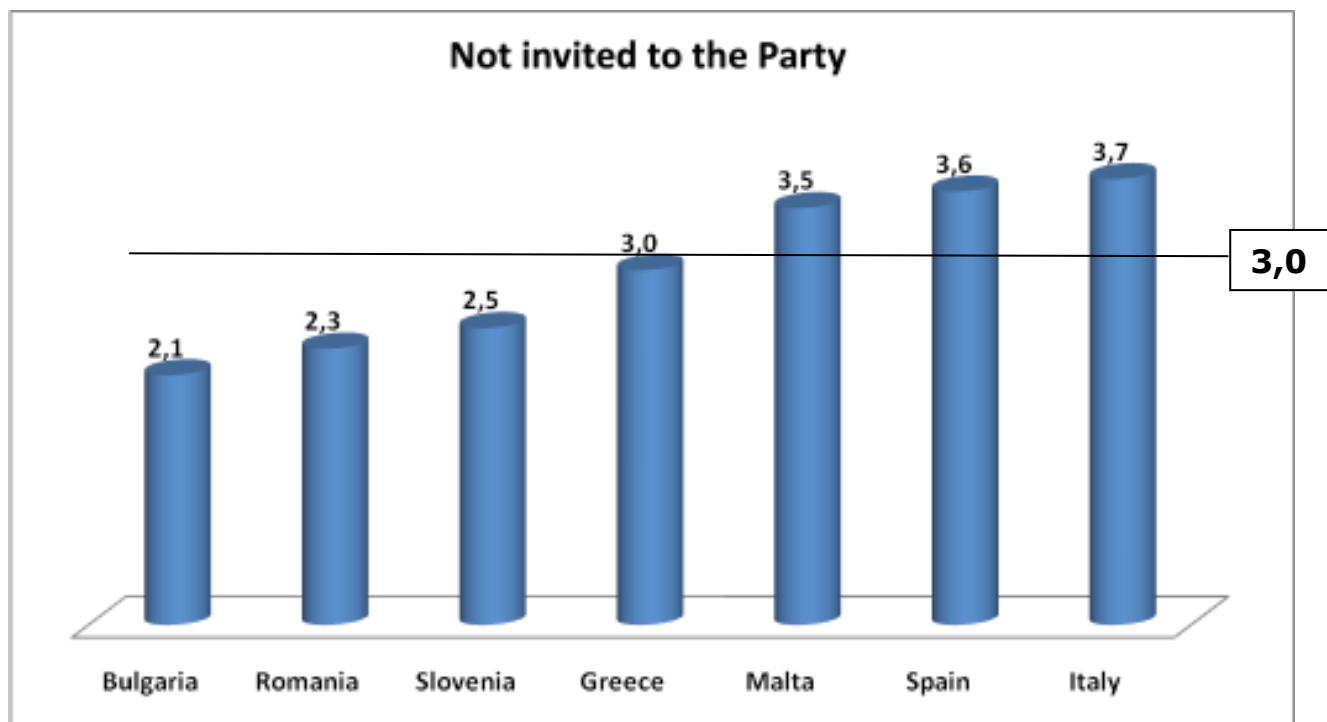
The overall results are similar to those presented by the parents: among the 7 countries involved in the survey we found again different assessments in Italy and Spain compared to these in Romania and Bulgaria. This is interesting since the countries are geographically and culturally close (Italy with Spain – Romania with Bulgaria).

Analysing each answer (the level of seriousness was assessed on a scale between 1 and 4) Spanish teachers gave a higher level of perception followed by teachers in Malta.



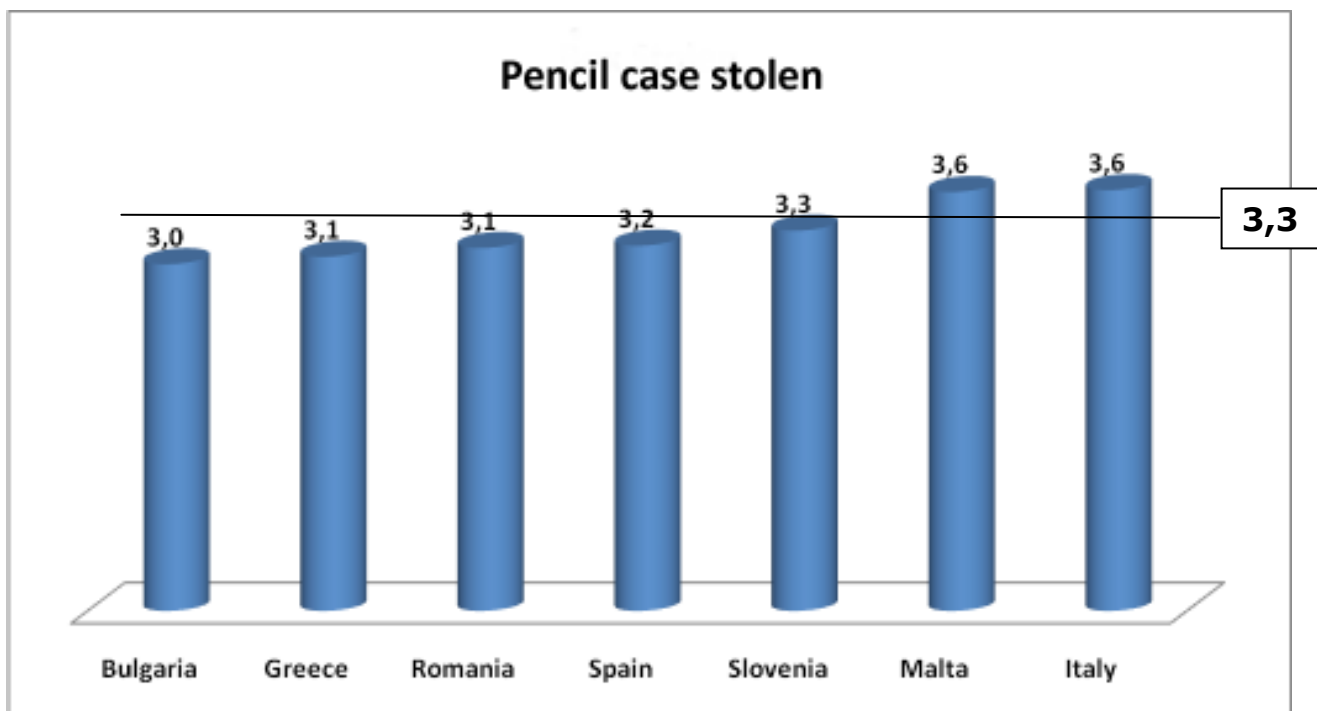
Scene number 1 describes an episode in which a child (aggressor) ruined a school friend's drawing on purpose. Common sense usually does not regard this as something very serious, although teachers do consider it 'quite serious' (average 2.9). However, we would like to stress the completely opposite perception between Spanish teachers who rate this episode with a 4 (very serious) and the Bulgarian teachers who rate it with a 2 (not very serious).

The second scene showed the episode of the exclusion from a party (the child was not invited): the alleged victim was not give a reason for his/her exclusion. The following bar chart shows that the average rate increases to 3.0, therefore even if minimally, this episode is nonetheless considered more serious than the previous one.

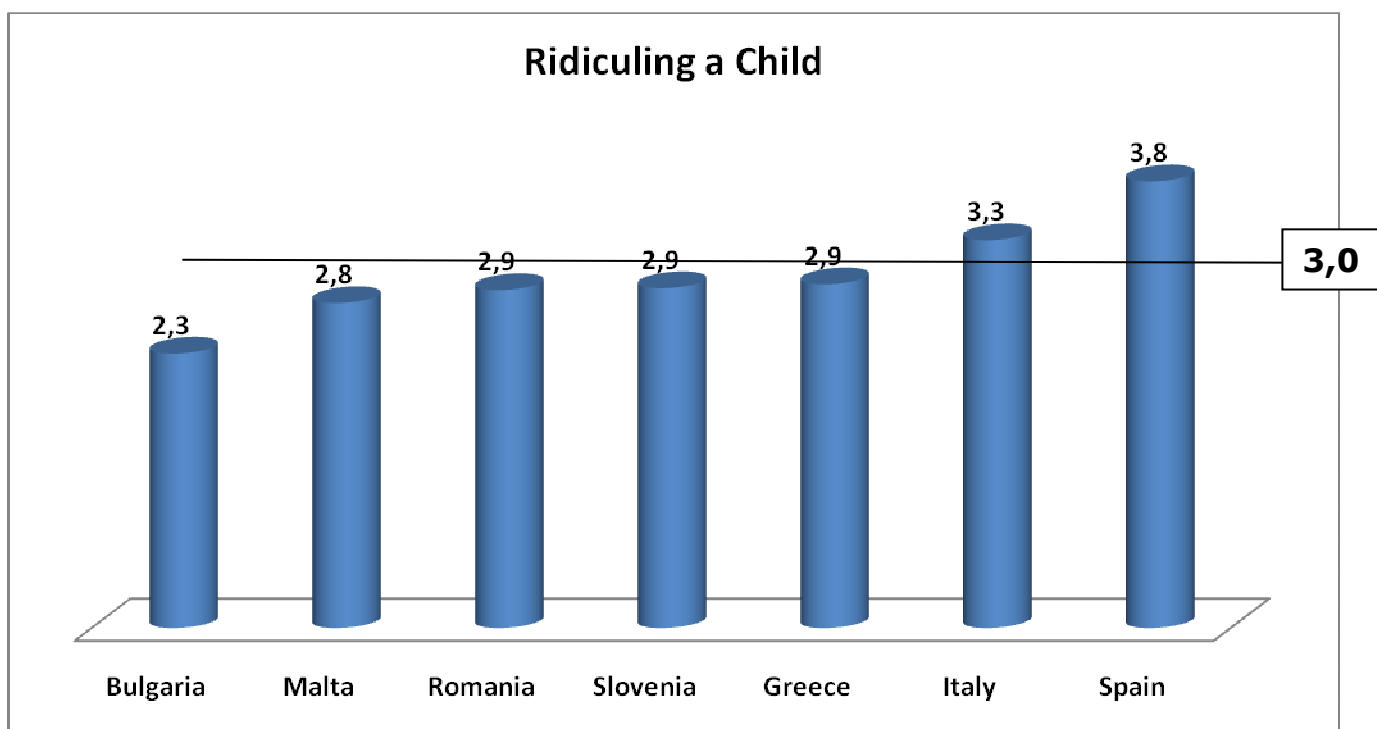


However, we can also see that the gap between the two geographical groups Italy-Spain and Romania-Bulgaria widens. In the first group this episode is assessed as 'quite serious' while in the second it is rated as 'slightly serious' (rating 2.0).

The different perception among countries doesn't remain stable even in the episode of the theft of the pencil case (an everyday school object the loss of which usually distresses the victim). Teachers assess this is more serious than the previous episodes (average 3.3) and also countries which are not strict in their assessments such as Bulgaria, regard this particular episode as 'quite serious'. Results are shown in the following bar chart.



Here are the results regarding scene 4.

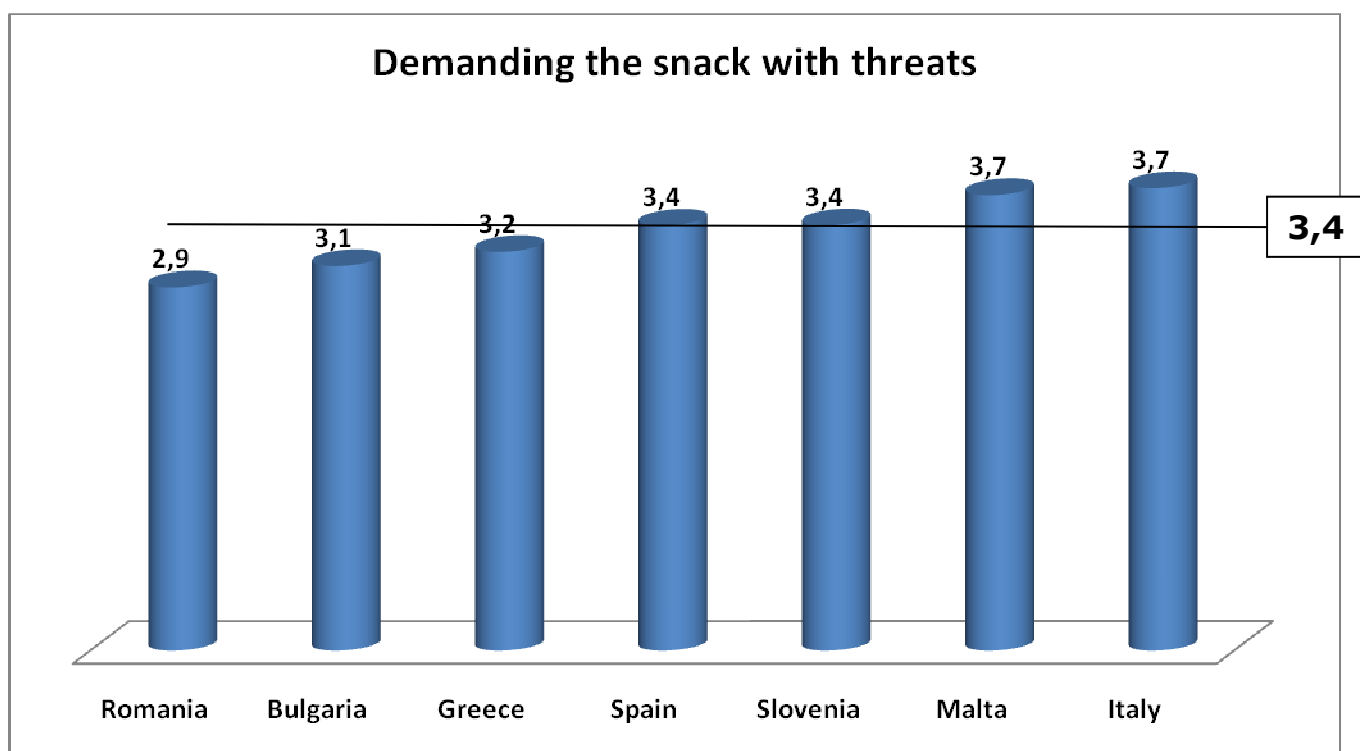


Scene 4 describes an episode in which a girl is mocked for her personal appearance. Despite the

usual differences among countries, the average here is lower than in the previous episodes (3.0)

This data is certainly debatable: if an adult considers under a legal point of view theft more serious than insulting it is not necessarily so for a child.

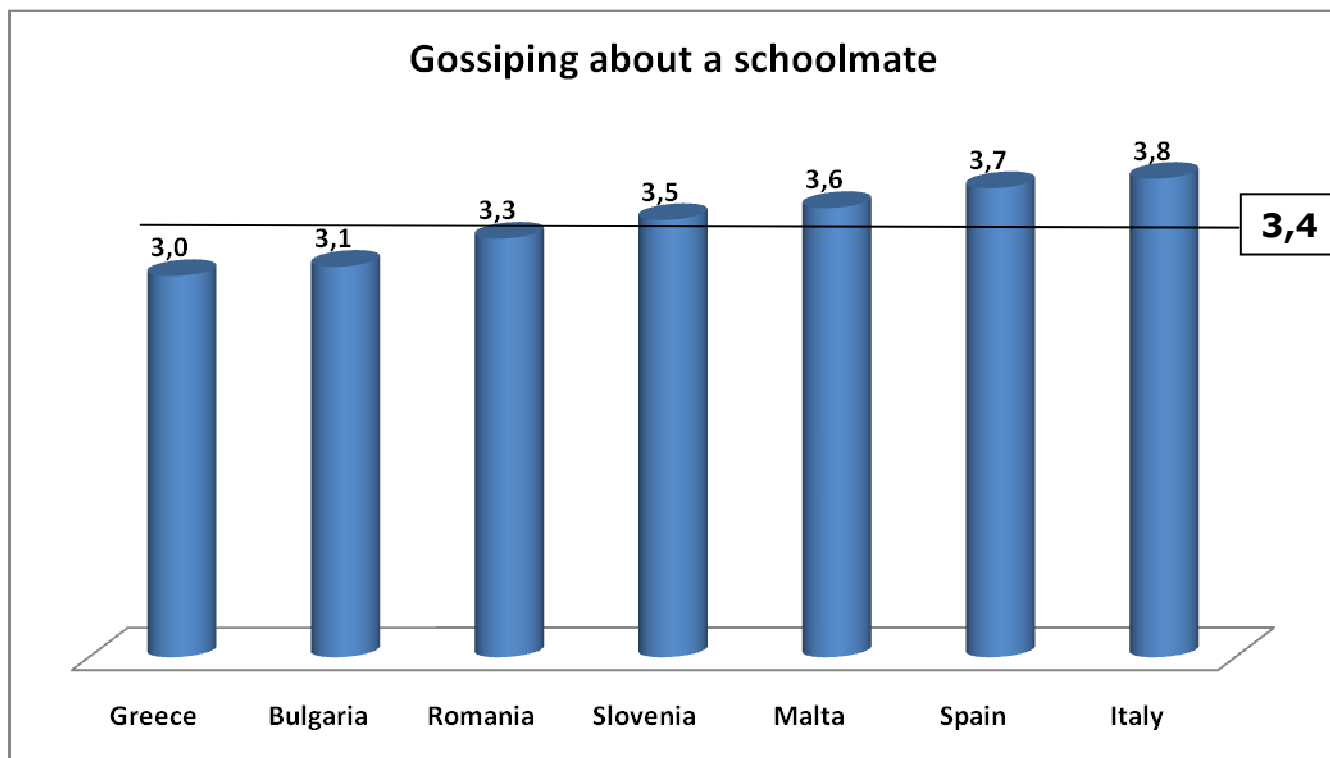
Scene 5 showed a typical bullying episode (a child expects a school friend to give him/her a snack). Here follow the results:



The overall trend shows many 3 and 4 ratings thus giving a general sense of importance. The description of the scene did not explain which was the victim's emotional response but it could be understood by the repeated requests, fully satisfied, for the snack.

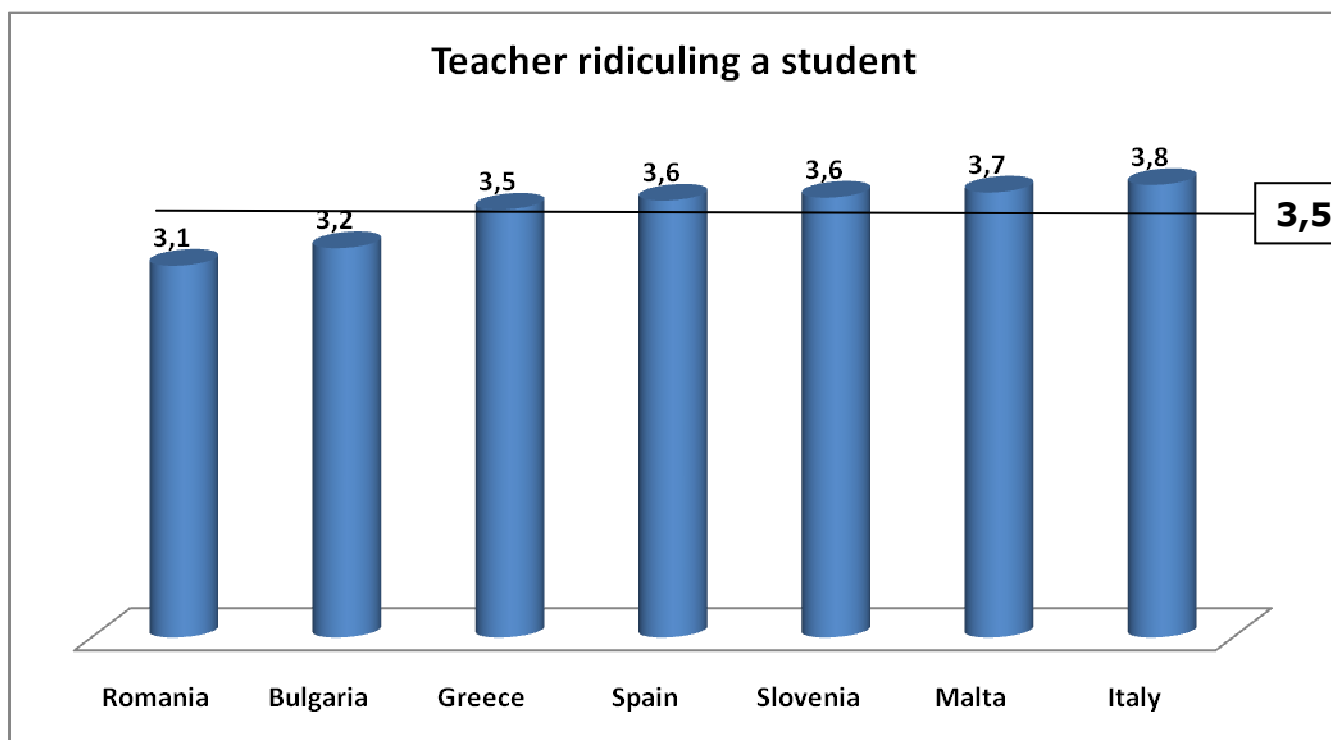
When reading the scene the respondents implied the victim's submissive response thus triggering a feeling of anger towards the bully. This can explain a more marked perception of violence.

We find the same perception of seriousness in scene 6. This episode regarded mocking a girl who actually was isolated in class.



Results steadily confirm the marked perception of seriousness by Italian and Spanish teachers compared to the one from the other countries. In general, all teachers consider these episodes quite serious and assess them with the right level of importance.

Scene 7 shows the incorrect behavior of a teacher. Exasperated by the student's poor performance the teacher ridicules him/her in front of the whole class.



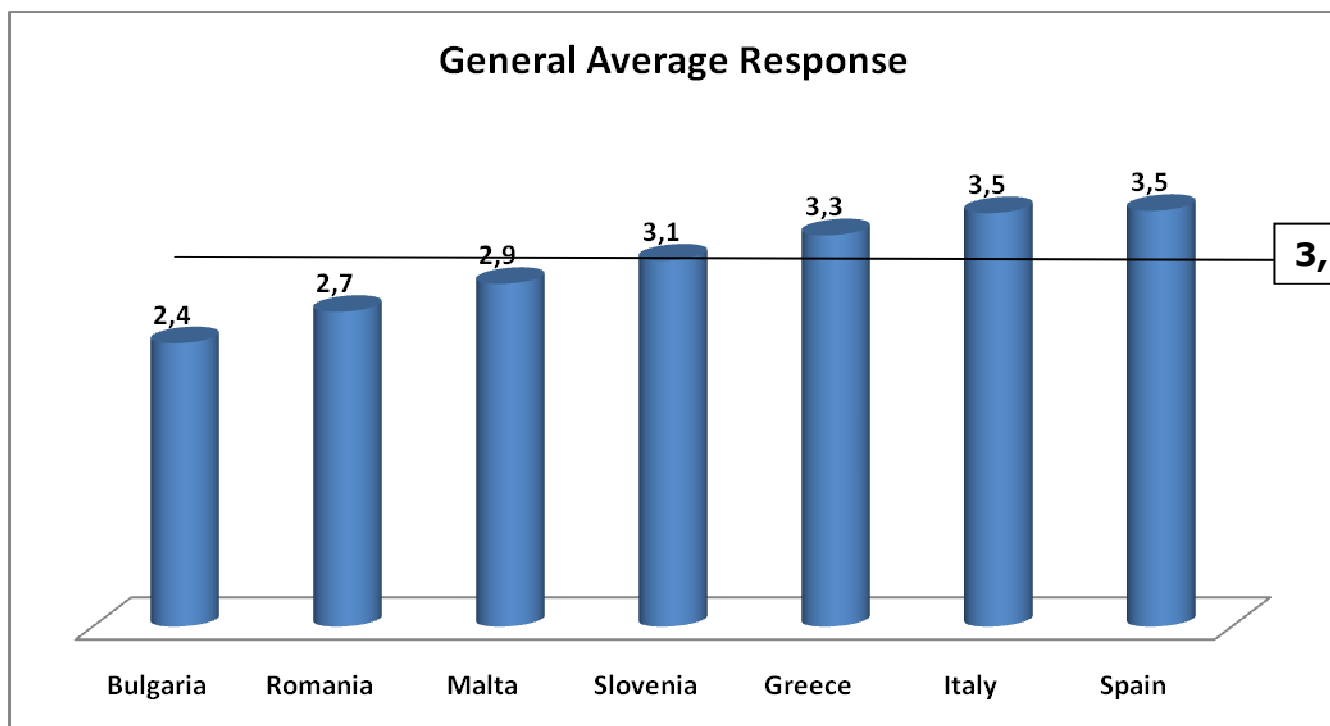
Here it is immediately clear that this occurrence has also other effects compared to similar ones amongst peers and is generally assessed serious by teachers. The average in fact increases to 3.5; quite high for such a mixed target group. All countries are above rating 3, showing a general trend towards seriousness.

In conclusion, the most relevant data are as following:

- I. the differences among countries in the perception of the same violent episodes. The analysis of variations confirms the importance of these differences among countries which are at the extremes: Spain-Italy and Romania-Bulgaria.
- II. teachers' general attention to violence in school, no matter how carried out. Despite the differences shown in the above charts, it is clear that teachers do not underestimate episodes such as those shown in the questionnaire.
- III. both teachers and parents consider violent episodes by an adult the most serious (in this case by a teacher). This is predictable and the literature shows that similar episodes are not rare.

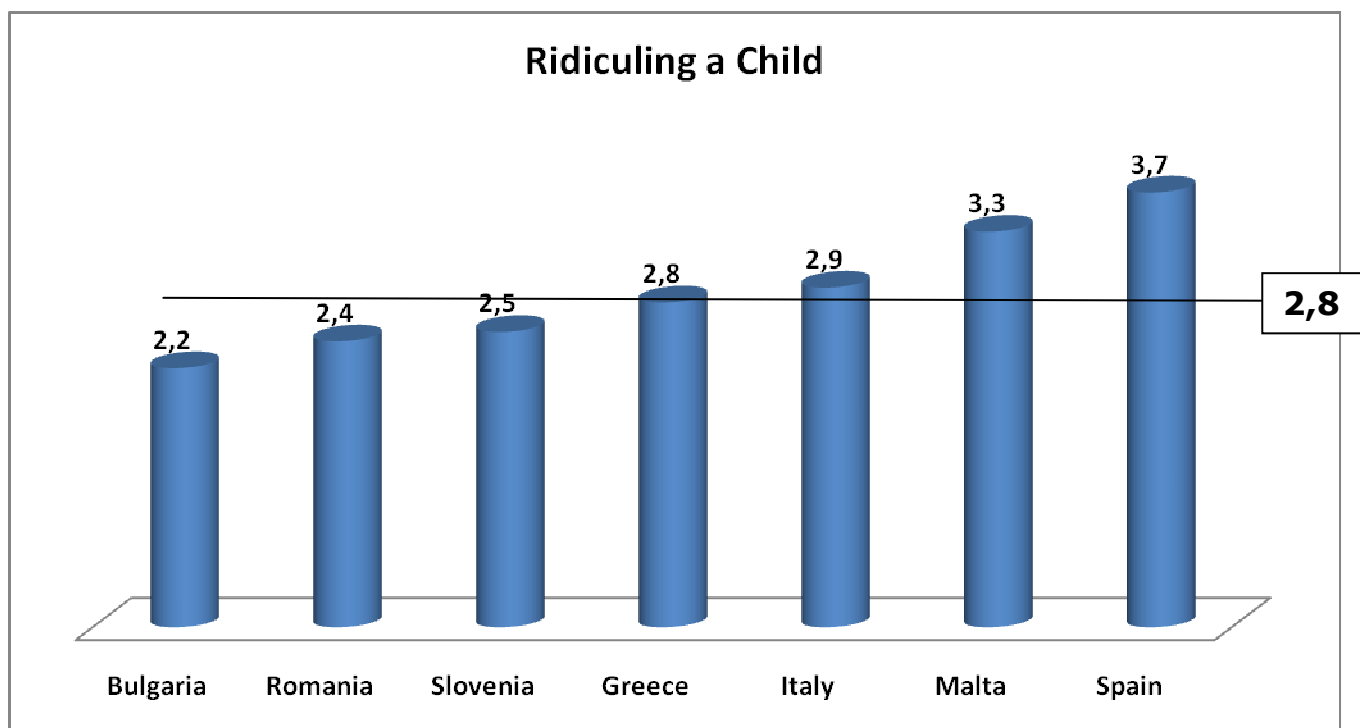
IV – Non teaching staff

The questionnaire to the non teaching staff required personal data and the rating of 4 episodes of violence using the usual 4-level Likert scale. Results are shown on the following chart.



We can see again a marked difference between the two extremes: non teaching staff from Spain and from Italy with an average of 3.5 rating and a majority of rating from 3 to 4. Non teaching staff from Bulgaria shows ratings of 2 and 3.

Scene 1 is not considered serious (2.8) although, when analyzing this data in depth we notice that there is a difference in perception among countries at the extremes of the chart: if Spain shows a rating of 3.7 this means more a 4 than a 3; Bulgaria on the other hand, decreases to 2.4, i.e. more a 2 than a 3.



We must not forget that the scene showed a child from a different ethnic group (the victim) mocked by some school mates. The scene is purposely ambiguous: it is obvious that treating it as a mere mocking episode is different from treating it as a proper case of racism.

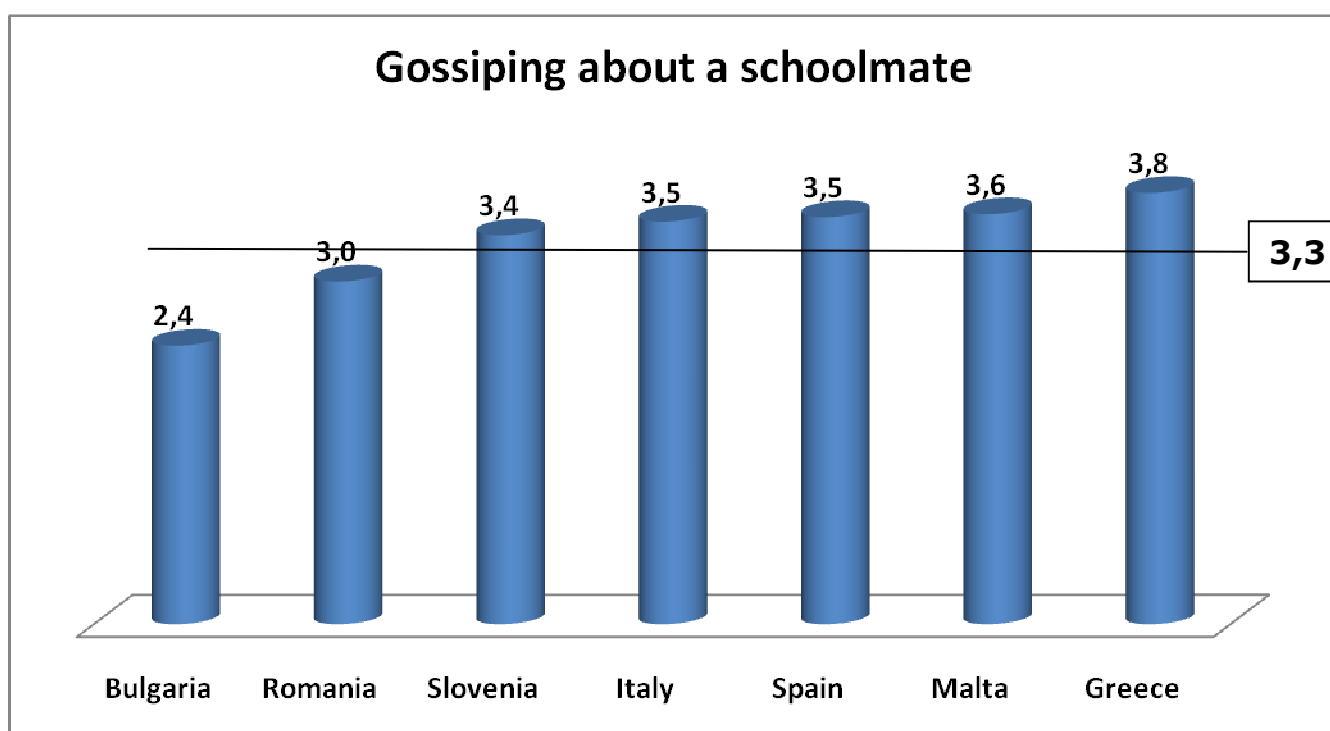
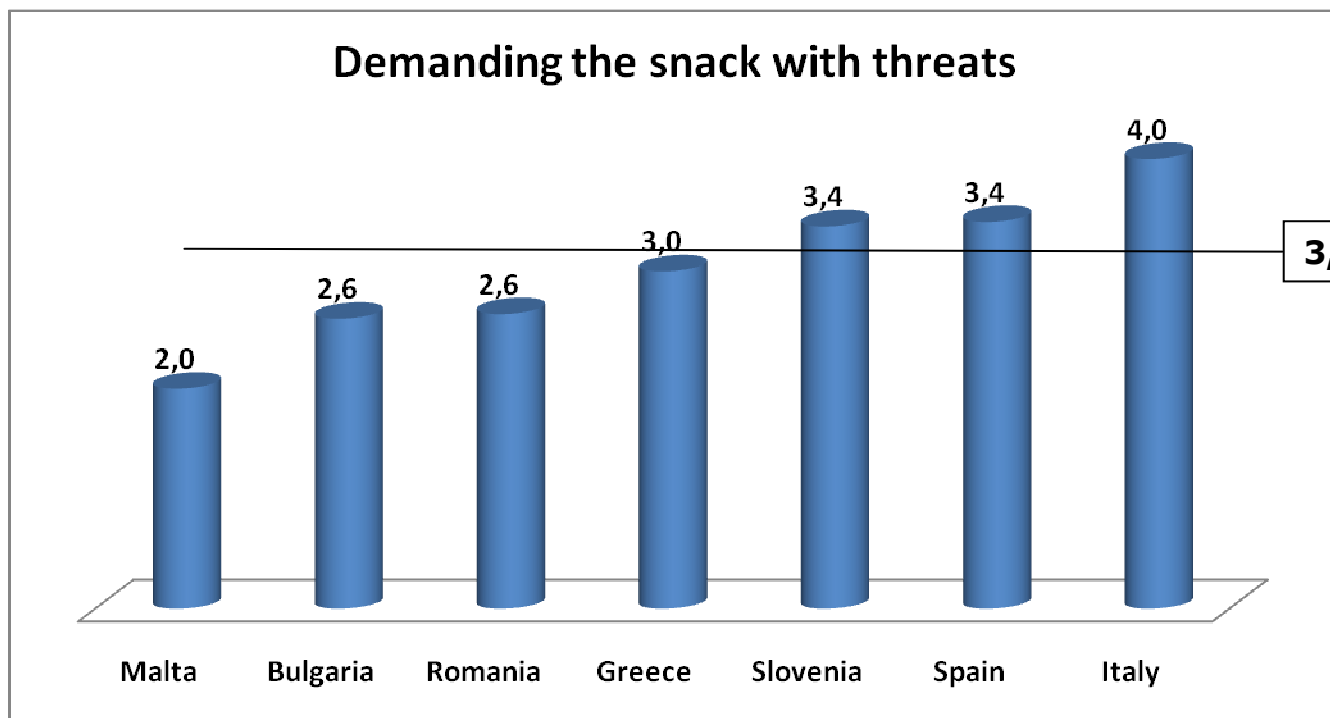
When assessing the answers from each country we should notice an important variable resulting from the different interpretation by the respondents. Instead, this is not so. Returning to the average rating, the fact can be explained in two different ways: either the episode has been considered racist and therefore there is a different assessment of its seriousness, or some countries all together have interpreted the episode as racist giving therefore a higher rating and other countries have considered it mere mocking regardless of skin-colour and giving therefore lower ratings. The latter hypothesis appears to be improbable. The interpretation of such an episode is always individual and cannot take one direction or another in the presence of more evaluators.

It is therefore more reasonable to believe that the result stems from a difference in the assessment from one country to another regardless of the real outcome.

The following charts show episode 2 (the theft of the pencil case), episode 3 (obtaining a snack with menaces) and episode 4 (ridiculing a school mate).



We can see the average difference in perception of the violence (from 3.1 to 3.3) and those among the various countries. In episode 3, for example, the assessment by the Italian non teaching staff (all 4 ratings) is notably different from that of the Maltese non teaching staff (average 2.0). Also to be considered is the second datum according to which 65% of the respondents witnessed or was told of an episode of violence in his/her school.



The perception of violence appears rather evident in the 4 target groups (children/parents/teachers/non teaching staff) and the various countries. Although part of everyday school life, the scenes and situations presented are recognized as examples of bullying, aggression

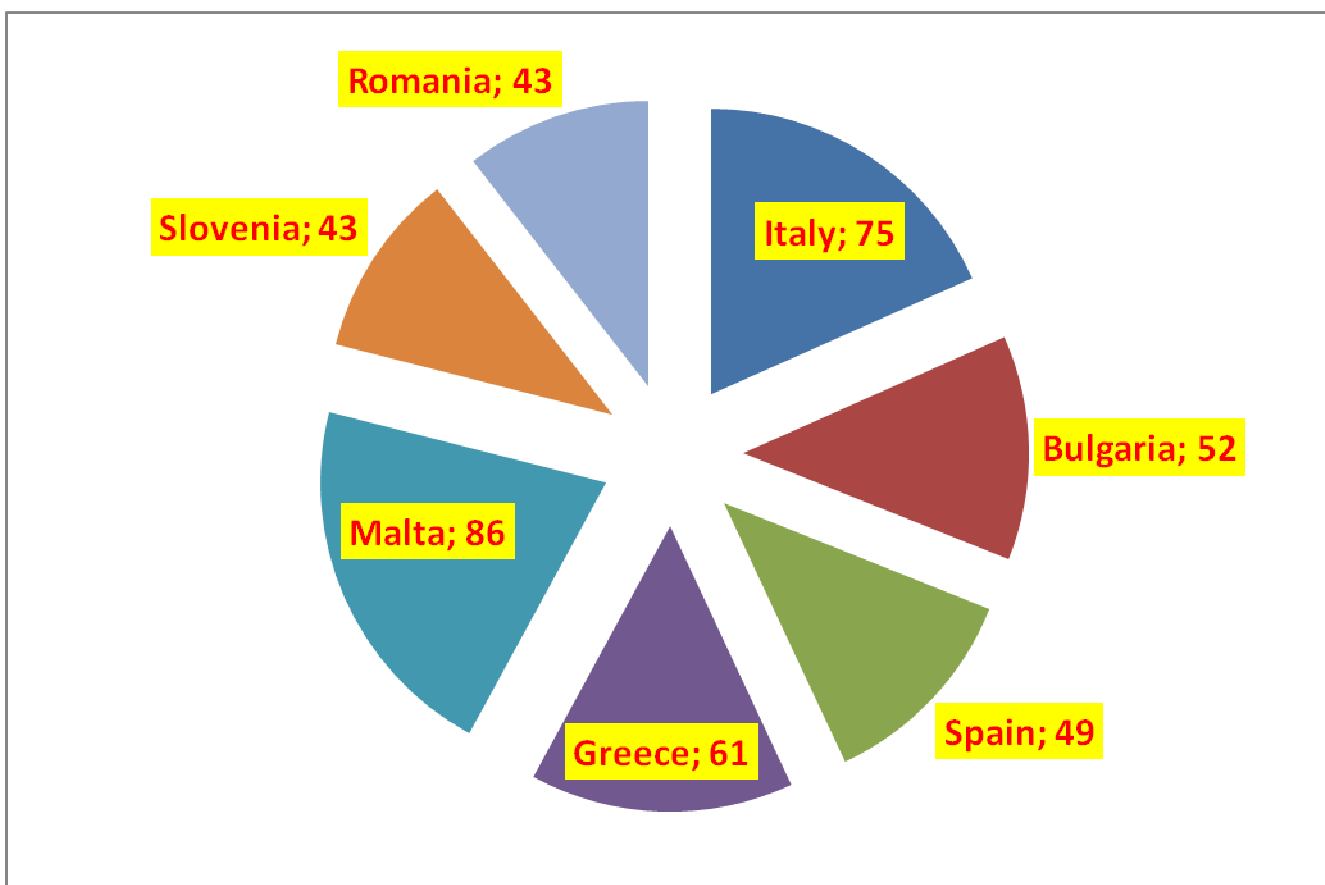
and violence.

The interpretations of younger children are more sadness, fear and shame oriented; older children, although confirming such data, show a leaning towards a reaction of rage and non-acceptance. Also interesting is the difference shown by the various countries which are regularly present in all episodes and situations.

Further assessment will study the comparison between boys and girls in the 4 target groups, as well as the specific social context in which the participating schools operate.

Drawings

The target group was composed by children from the 1st and 2nd year of primary school totaling 409 students divided as follows:



Drawings were classified according to the following criteria:

- I. Number of characters
- II. Number of aggressors



- III. Aggressor’s gender
- IV. Victim’s gender
- V. Type of aggression (physical/verbal/theft)
- VI. Possible intent of the aggressor (humiliate/exclude/bully)
- VII. Victim’s reaction (indifference/reaction/giving in)
- VIII. Victim’s emotional response (sadness/calm/surprise/fear/shame/anger)

The aim of the pictures was to gather further data regarding emotional responses and mental representations of violence in younger children.

The analysis was carried out by two experts in the field of interpretation of children’s drawings who worked independently and reached an inter-rater agreement of 97%.

Let’s analyse the results.

Number of characters (%)

One character	Two characters	More than two characters
13	64	22

4% of the characters was recognised as the “rescuer”, i.e. the victim’s defender.

From this first table we can determine the following: the scene imagined by the children includes two kinds of characters, an aggressor and a victim, as we can see from the **picture 1** drawn by a Rumanian child. This is an interesting detail since in reality a violent episode has almost never only two protagonists: it usually occurs in the presence of other people. This confirms the poor understanding of violence amongst peers. It is in fact generally believed that such an episode involves only the direct actors and not all those who are bystanders or who are not present but know.

Above data are confirmed by the high percentage (86%) of drawings in which the aggressor is only one.



Picture 1



Picture 2

The drawing under study, taken as an example of many other similar ones, reveals also other factors of the mental image that children have of violence. The typical aggressor is generally bigger than the victim, physically if not by age. The aggressor has a threatening stance and looks somehow 'tough' (scars, smoking a cigarette), his attire is in line with the character (t-shirt with skull and crossbones) and usually uses strength to get what he/she wants.

Also the fact the 13% of the drawings has only one character is very interesting. This brings to mind the victim after the fact, an image of loneliness and sadness. Children who represented violence in such a way (**Picture 2** - drawing by a Spanish child) perhaps shows an even higher degree of sensitivity since the role of victim is often not occasional but repeated and constant. The victim is often the same and his/her emotions, often understood by adults, are primarily loneliness and sadness. **Picture 2** shows the expression of suffering in the face and the arms are spread open almost as a sign of defeat and powerlessness.

The following table shows the percentage of acts of violence divided by gender.

%	MALE	FEMALE
AGGRESSOR	63	37
VICTIM	49	51

As expected, the typical aggressor is male but we also notice that a significant 37% of the drawings shows that the aggressor is instead female (see **Picture 3** - drawing by a Maltese girl).

As in many other drawings of this kind, the aggressor is enjoying him/herself and laughs coarsely while watching the result of his/her behaviour. Note also the victim's expression between surprise and helplessness.

However, the typical stereotype of the aggressor is male as drawn by a Slovenian child (**Picture 4**). The aggressor's expression is also interesting: it is one of satisfaction and his mouth shows a row of pointed teeth. The aggressor occupies most of the page and he is placed right in the middle confirming the importance given to him. The victim is squashed at a side crying and looking helpless.

A further variable is the type of aggression:



Picture 3



Picture 4

VERBAL	PHYSICAL	THEFT
61%	34%	5%



Picture5

Mental representations and later graphic ones by children aged 6-8 show mainly verbal violence. This is very important because it shows that children classify as violence also aggressive stance and language, even without any physical contact.

Amongst the many drawings which represent this kind of violence we have selected the following:

The Maltese girl has ingeniously defined some typical traits of the idea of violence (**Picture 5**). In the drawing, the position of the aggressor is higher than the victim's. This looks like the typical situation of a young girl being mocked: she is younger, more naïve and dressed like a typical girl of her age. The scene takes place in the open, a place therefore which is not contained as a classroom would be and that teachers cannot easily control.

We can deduce the aggressor's intent from his expression and that of the victim as well as by the behavior of both. His intent can be summarized as follows:

HUMILIATE	EXCLUDE	SUBDUE
31%	23%	46%

Picture 6 is the typical scene in which the aggressor humiliates his victim ridiculing her may be for her physical appearance. Although in lower percentage, also the episodes of exclusion are important as shown in the drawing by an Italian girl in which the two aggressors clearly tell her they do not want her with them.

The victim's reaction is generally of passive acceptance (74%). In 22% of the cases there is a reaction whereas 4% of the victims do not seem to consider the episode important.



Picture 6

The victim's emotions understood from the drawings are summarised in the following table:

VICTIM'S EMOTIONS	%
SADNESS	70
RAGE	12
SHAME	10
INDIFFERENCE	4
FEAR	2
SURPRISE	2

Fear does not emerge from the drawings as the prevailing emotion. This may imply that the violent episodes are not considered particularly dangerous for the victim. What instead seems evident is the feeling of sadness. In the following drawing (**Picture 7**) we can see the representation of an angered response by the victim who answers back.



Picture 7

A last thing to mention is that 11% of the drawings showed scenes not referable to aggression and violence, e.g. **Picture 8** by a Bulgarian child. It could be that the teachers were not clear in their

explanation or also a kind of avoidance by some children of contents which might be too emotionally strong.

We have found great difference in the representation of violence, mainly from one country to another. When analysing details, whether colours and paper were used or not, some classes have been particularly precise in answering this part of the questionnaire whereas other seem to have neglected it.



Picture 8

7. Future development of the research

The use of drawings has been very interesting. It would be important that in future these were used also with older children. Furthermore, taking care that A4 sheets are used as well as colours (not compulsory) certain parameters such as the spatial position of the characters, the use of colours and which of them have been used (Burkitt et al, 2003;. Thomas and Jolley, 1998) could be better analysed.

It would also be useful to gather the children's comments about their drawings to assess more easily the idea the child wanted to represent. Children could be asked, before starting to draw, to recall a real episode as suggested by Butler et al. (1995) and by Cox, (2005).

In future research other items could be added to the questionnaire in order to ask children to assess the level of seriousness of certain episodes as we have done with adults.

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